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ABSTRACT

This report tells the stories of dozens of low-income families from all parts of Kentucky. It is a personal report, compiled after 4 months of travel and interviews. The report also makes recommendations for improvements in programs designed to serve impoverished families. The introduction discusses the seeming paradoxes of poverty and generosity, powerlessness and strength, and futility and hope that exist within the families. Chapter 1 records the stories of single women raising children on low-wage jobs or federal benefits. At present, most families who are together fall between the cracks of Kentucky's human services programs. Chapter 2 includes stories that illustrate the current shortcomings in Kentucky's health programs. Chapter 3 discusses the issue of low-income housing. Chapter 4 deals with public education and low-income families. While parents place a high value on education, too often their children are stigmatized by a system that helps label them as "poor." Social and economic pressures push such students out of school. Chapter 5, "Success Stories: The GED and Beyond," shows that even the most depressing stories can have a happy ending. Most of these stories are testaments to the benefits of additional education for the parents. The executive summary includes recommendations for policy changes, designed to counter problems related to poverty in Kentucky. (TES)

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NOT POOR IN SPIRIT:

Hope for Kentucky's Low-income Families and Children

A Report By Kentucky Youth Advocates

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NOT POOR IN SPIRIT:

Hope for Kentucky's Low-income Families and Children

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Dedication

This report is dedicated
to all the families and children
who shared their stories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Not Poor in Spirit tells the stories of real Kentucky families and children. We could not have met and talked with the people whose lives are portrayed in this report without a great deal of help. Organizations across the state responded quickly and enthusiastically when we asked them to arrange for us to meet with families and children with whom they work. We are particularly grateful to the staff and volunteers of the several Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) programs we visited. We also wish to recognize volunteer Don Cull who photographed several families from Jefferson and Bullitt Counties. We hope that the organizations we worked with and the people we wrote about will find that we deserved their trust. We specifically want to acknowledge the following organizations and their staffs:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report tells the stories of dozens of low-income families from all parts of the state. It is a very personal report, unlike any Kentucky Youth Advocates has produced in its eleven-year history of representing the interests of Kentucky's children and families. Compiled after four months of travel and interviews, the report also makes recommendations for improvements in programs designed to serve impoverished families. As explained in more detail below, Kentucky can and should play a greater role in helping low-income families. Programs which enhance the ability of low-income parents to become more self-sufficient can and do work. Most poor people want to become independent, but they can only do so if they are provided opportunities.

The Kentucky Character

The introductory chapter of *Not Poor in Spirit* discusses the seeming paradoxes of poverty and generosity, powerlessness and strength, and futility and hope within the families interviewed for this report. Despite their lack of material wealth, most Kentuckians author Nancy Gall-Clayton talked with were open, warm, and optimistic. Their lives are not easy, but they believe in a brighter tomorrow, if not for themselves, then for their children. We recognize that not all poor families are like the 91 families in our sample. Some low-income parents may not seize opportunities to better themselves, some may be bitter and angry, some may see only bleakness when they look into the future. Nonetheless, we were impressed by the strength and determination shared by so many of the individuals interviewed for this report and we believe that their attitudes and beliefs prevail among most low-income individuals.

Life Below the Federal Poverty Guidelines

The first chapter of the report, "Life Below the Federal Poverty Guidelines," records the stories of single women raising children on low-wage jobs or grants from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Also included are stories about two-parent families ineligible for AFDC because both parents live in the home. At present, most families who are together fall between the cracks of Kentucky's human service programs. Both single and two-parent families living below the federal poverty guidelines face many problems. AFDC grants are too small, public housing too scarce, food stamp purchases too restricted. Last summer's drought and heat practically eliminated the need for day labor, a mainstay of some rural families. Other jobs were hard to find, too. Lack of transportation and the inability to secure appropriate childcare also contribute to families being poor.

We recommend providing AFDC to all poor families as well as creating and expanding support programs that would enable low-income parents to find and maintain jobs. Specifically, we recommend that:

- Kentucky should expand Medicaid coverage to recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) who become em-

ployed. Without Medicaid coverage, such employees may be forced to quit their jobs and return to the AFDC rolls when needed health care for themselves or their children is beyond their means.

- Kentucky should subsidize childcare costs to the extent needed for all recipients of AFDC who become employed. Subsidies should remain available so long as the recipient is employed. The cost of childcare for two preschool aged children very nearly equals the net income of a minimum-wage worker. Without childcare subsidies, many AFDC recipients will be unable to join the workforce.

- Even before federal legislation, effective in October of 1990, requires the state to include two-parent households in the AFDC program, Kentucky should offer AFDC benefits to two-parent families. Without such coverage, two-parent families may separate to entitle their children to benefits. Children in two-parent families may suffer because their parents cannot afford to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

- Kentucky should gradually raise its "standard of need" to equal the federal poverty guidelines. The standard is the amount of money the state assumes a family must have to meet its basic needs. Because Kentucky's standard is low, Kentucky's AFDC grants are low. Presently, both are approximately one-third of the federal poverty guidelines. An increase in the standard of need would result in low-income families having more of the resources they need.

- Kentucky should assist more AFDC recipients to secure jobs by developing training and counseling programs tailored to their needs. Most AFDC recipients want to work but lack credentials and skills that would enable them to secure decent jobs.

- Kentucky should continue its recent intensification of efforts to collect child support from non-custodial parents. The receipt of child support could lift a custodial parent and their children out of poverty. The state should help children obtain all the resources to which they are entitled, including child support.

If You've Got Your Health...

The second chapter, "If You've Got Your Health...," includes stories that illustrate the present shortcomings in Kentucky's health care programs intended to serve low-income families and children. The state's stringent eligibility guidelines for Medicaid (the state health insurance for low-income people) allow only the poorest of the poor access to government health care coverage. In addition, many parents who are employed in low-wage jobs cannot afford private health insurance. The result is tens of thousands of Kentuckians lack health care. Even pregnant women who are covered by the Medicaid program sometimes have difficulty finding a nearby physician willing to treat them. For many rural Kentuckians, transportation to health care providers is as tough to find as a doctor who will care for them. To meet these and other shortcomings, we recommend the following:

- Kentucky should encourage more physicians, particularly in rural areas, to accept Medicaid cards for prenatal care by the use of both incentives and disincentives. The lack of ready access to prenatal care is the beginning of a chain of events that sometimes ends with low-weight, high-risk babies who may require intensive, costly hospital care.

- Kentucky should publicize the availability of transportation subsidies under the Medicaid program for medical appointments. Low-income parents who are unaware of these subsidies sometimes delay needed care for themselves or their children. Untreated minor conditions may turn into more complicated ones which require more extensive and expensive care.

- Kentucky should expand publicity and referrals to the Kentucky Physicians Care Program. The voluntary private-sector program is designed to serve poor families whose income is too high for eligibility in the Medicaid program. Without knowledge of the program, low-income families may not seek needed health care. Early treatment for injuries and illnesses is both humane and cost effective.

- Kentucky should provide Medicaid coverage to all children in those families where other children qualify, if the excluded child is enrolled in public school. The current rule precluding certain older children from coverage should be modified so that even children over eighteen years of age are eligible if they are attempting to complete their education. Their diploma could be first step toward economic independence.

- Kentucky should periodically inform Medicaid recipients that physicians may request reimbursement for drugs not on the Medicaid drug formulary. Medicaid recipients who cannot afford prescribed drugs sometimes go into debt buying the drugs or go without.

- Kentucky should update the Medicaid reimbursement schedules for both dentists and physicians to account for inflation. Low reimbursement rates discourage participation in the program and thus decrease the availability of health care to low-income families.

- Kentucky should pay for semiannual teeth-cleaning through the Medicaid program because preventive dental care is less costly than corrective treatment.

A Roof Over Their Heads

The third chapter, "A Roof Over Their Heads," discusses the issue of housing for low-income Kentuckians. Housing codes do not exist in most of the state. In rural Kentucky, both rental and owner-occupied homes may lack indoor plumbing. Public housing is often poorly maintained and uninviting though it is considered a Godsend by those with no alternative. More and more Kentuckians, including families with children, are counted among the homeless. To alleviate the lack of affordable, decent housing for low-income families, we recommend the following:

- Kentucky should fund more programs which shelter homeless families while helping such families become more independent. Though only a short-term solution, shelters are needed to enable families to stay together. The provision of support services to help parents gain skills and knowledge which can lead to greater self-sufficiency may decrease the likelihood of repeated homelessness.

- Kentucky should offer low-interest loans to landlords and owners who wish to make improvements or additions such as running water, indoor plumbing, and furnaces to their properties. Decent housing is a prerequisite to allowing low-income families to address other issues in their lives that may enable them to become more independent.

- Kentucky should provide incentives to encourage counties to enact housing codes which require the provision of basic services such as heat, water, and electricity to tenants. However, the incentive program must be designed so that it does not decrease the supply of affordable homes. Without housing codes, substandard homes will continue to be rented to families who simply cannot afford decent housing.

- Kentucky should restore housing as a funding category under the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program. The recent elimination of housing as a funding category will divert thousands of federal dollars which would have been spent on housing for low-income Kentuckians. Instead, most of these funds will be spent on unspecified "special projects."

- Kentucky should provide financia support to organizations whose mission is to increase housing for low-income Kentuckians. Affordable, acceptable housing is in short supply. As stated earlier, such housing is necessary if families are to be able to address other issues in their lives.

- The Kentucky Housing Corporation should continue to approve bond issues to finance mortgages for families of low or moderate income. As stated in state legislation governing the Corporation, the serious shortage of affordable, decent, safe, and sanitary housing in our state "is inimical to the health, safety, welfare and prosperity of all residents of the Commonwealth and to the sound growth of Kentucky communities." The availability of affordable, decent housing to low and moderate income families will reduce homelessness and certainly will improve the quality of life for the affected families.

Education: "The Path to a Larger Life"

The fourth chapter, "Education: The Path to a Larger Life," deals with public education as it affects children from low-income families. Without exception, parents interviewed for this report place a high value on education and expect their offspring to earn at least a high school diploma. Practices in public schools sometimes result in children being labeled as "poor." Too often schools administer the "free lunch" and "free textbook" programs in ways that embarrass and stigmatize eligible students. In a number of districts, "tuition" is charged, according to the grade

level, simply for the privilege of attending school. Social and economic pressure combine to push students out of school. Low budgets at some schools result in students having fewer opportunities than their counterparts at better financed schools. To counter these and other problems, we recommend the following:

- Kentucky should provide free textbooks to all students. Until such a policy is adopted, the Kentucky Department of Education should mandate the use of procedures designed to insure the anonymity of eligible students. The branding of students as poor may cause them to feel outside the educational mainstream and even to drop out of school.

- Kentucky should prohibit public schools from charging "tuition fees," "laboratory fees," or fees of any type for attending classes of one's choosing. Inability to pay may cause students to take only free classes or to drop out of school altogether.

- Kentucky should prohibit public schools from requiring that parents purchase snacks, tissues or other items for students. Poor families simply cannot afford these surcharges on public education.

- Schools of education and the Kentucky Department of Education should provide instructional materials to teachers which describe effective disciplinary methods to use instead of corporal punishment. Physical disciplinary techniques can lower students' self-esteem and influence negatively their school experience.

- The Parents Are Partners Training Program should be used as a model to recruit and train volunteers to perform tasks on a paraprofessional level to help students succeed in school. The use of paraprofessionals may make available a service or program that students would otherwise miss. However, such efforts should not substitute indefinitely for services and programs to which children are entitled.

- The Kentucky Department of Education and the Cabinet for Human Resources should work jointly to develop a method of supplying low-income students with feminine hygiene supplies and lice shampoo. Parents' inability to purchase these items sometimes prevent children from attending school.

Success Stories: The GED and Beyond

The final chapter in this report, "Success Stories: The GED and Beyond," proves that even the most depressing of stories can have a happy ending. Most happy endings begin with additional education. Everyone in the family gains when a parent whose only income is an AFDC grant reach an educational milestone. Likewise, state government and the general citizenry gain since receipt of a GED, a diploma, or a certificate may enable a low-income parent to obtain employment, thus decreasing or eliminating the parent's reliance on tax-supported programs. Without

subsidies for transportation and childcare, however, few AFDC recipients can enroll in GED programs, vocational school, or college. With these subsidies, many AFDC recipients can break out of poverty. The continuation and expansion of programs that will encourage low-income parents to further their education will have many beneficial effects. Specifically, we recommend:

- Kentucky should publicize literacy, GED, and post-high school training and should actively recruit low-income parents to enroll. As stated in the title of a recent book by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, education is "the path to a larger future." Kentucky should help its low-income citizens start down that path so that they may become more independent while also setting a positive example for their children.

- Kentucky should provide incentives to encourage the establishment of quality childcare centers in areas where few exist. In such areas, the state should reimburse caretakers, including relatives in the home, while parents attend educational programs. Without liberal childcare policies, particularly in rural areas, many AFDC recipients will be unable to take advantage of educational opportunities.

- Kentucky should make prompt payments for childcare needed during a parents' attendance at school. Currently, most payments are two months in arrears. The delay in payment may force a parent to pay childcare providers with money needed for rent or other necessities.

- The Cabinet for Human Resources should work cooperatively with other agencies to replicate the One-Parent Family Facility developed in Fayette County. The facility provides low cost housing and childcare as well as other support services for low-income parents who are college students. With college training, better-paying jobs are available. The likelihood that a low-income parent will become independent is greatly increased.

FOREWORD

You are about to read a report that describes in very personal terms the lives of some of Kentucky's low-income families and children. When we began our research for this report in late May of 1988, we knew that Kentucky had the third fastest growing poverty rate in the country and that 29 percent of Kentucky children were living in poverty. We knew that benefits under Kentucky's Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) program amounted to only one third of the federal poverty guideline. We were aware of homeless families in this state and we knew that some children were going to bed hungry. In 1983, we documented that large numbers of Kentuckians had no access to health care and in 1984 we reported that our public schools did not always serve the best interests of children.

Despite the fact that we knew a great deal, most of our knowledge was gleaned from sterile studies and statistics published by Congressional committees, the Census Bureau, and state agencies and organizations. Statistics do not tell the whole story. By definition, they tell the story of a hypothetical "average" family or person. We decided, however, that we wanted to learn about real families and real individuals. We consciously decided to talk to Kentucky families to hear their stories in their own words.

We planned to sit down with parents, particularly single mothers, who represent a greater and greater percentage of the household heads in Kentucky. We wanted to hear from them what it is like to raise a family in Kentucky on a limited income. We wondered what worried them and what frustrated them. Most of all, we wanted to know about their hopes for themselves and their dreams for their children.

To conduct the research, we sent a part-time attorney on our staff, Nancy Gall-Clayton, on trips totalling some 4,600 miles last summer and fall. She met with 91 individuals and families from 30 different counties. In addition, she talked with staff from several dozen organizations to learn which problems they believed were most pressing for low- income families. Details about how we found the people we interviewed and our research methodology may be found in Appendix 1.

The staff and board of Kentucky Youth Advocates had two major concerns about what we initially called our "families book." Could we write it without violating people's privacy and could we do it in a non-exploitative way? To address the first concern, we used fictitious names and we identified the people we talked with by county rather than city or town. A few people insisted that their real names be used and, in those cases, we complied with their reques' Further, we asked the people whom we interviewed to tell us their stories in their own way. In essence, they controlled the content and direction of the interview. To avoid being exploitative, we decided we would not publish the study at all unless we could offer concrete suggestions for changes we learned were needed in the programs that serve low-income families. Equally important we did our best to provide a report that is both fair and accurate.

We could not have undertaken a project of this size without the support and assistance of the many non-profit organizations across the state which directed us to our interviewees. We also are very grateful for the moral and financial support we received from Sallie Bingham to pursue this project.

We believe and hope we have been successful in reporting on the experiences of some of Kentucky's low- income families. We think you will learn from the report. We hope you will experience both the joy and the sorrow that the families we met so willingly shared with us.

David W. Richart
Executive Director
December 1988

INTRODUCTION: THE KENTUCKY CHARACTER

My head is full of images from the trips I made through Kentucky during the summer and fall of 1988. The people I met and the stories they shared will stay with me a very long time. I made nine trips throughout the state, talking with 91 low-income families in the process. While their stories almost tell themselves, I would like to introduce the stories by discussing what I am calling the Kentucky character.

As I returned from each of my trips, I related my experiences to my colleagues at Kentucky Youth Advocates, sometimes informally, sometimes during staff meetings. I often had pictures of the people I told them about and occasionally a tape recording. At times we laughed together and other times, we literally wept. I saw stark poverty and I met people who had endured incredible hardships, both physical and emotional. As a result of the stories I shared with our staff, we began to sense what I am calling the Kentucky character.

It makes me nervous to write about the Kentucky character because it is hard to define and easy to misinterpret. I am not saying that the people I met want to be poor or enjoy being poor. As Joyce Harvey of the Christian Appalachian Project said, "Being poor is not a voluntary way of life." The low-income families I met do not necessarily accept their poverty with grace, but most that I met do live gracefully. They are not angry or bitter but neither are they complacent. They accept their lives but, at the same time, have hope.

While most of the people I met were hopeful and positive, I realize that other poor people may be just the opposite. I know that poor people, like other people, have faults and sometimes make unfortunate or unwise decisions. In short, the 91 families interviewed for this report may not be representative of all low-income Kentuckians.

As described in Appendix 1, I located the interviewees by asking Kentucky-based organizations to put me in touch with "children and families whose lives may illustrate shortcomings in the vairous helping systems of state and federal government." Generally, I was referred to parents and youth who were articulate and knowledgeable about programs designed to help low-income families. Their verbal skills and knowledge may account in varying degree for whatever success they have had in addressing their problems.

The low-income parents and young people I met are strong and determined. They work hard, simply to survive. Their daily lives are full of obstacles most of us have never considered, let alone faced. They manage, despite these obstacles, and manage without even a hint of malice. On the contrary, the people I met tend to be kindly and optimistic. They may feel, and probably correctly in some cases, that their own lives are not destined to improve. Still, they believe in a future for their children that will be better. "I don't want them to have to live the way I have," I heard again and again.

Some stories about low-income families in this report may leave readers in suspense or frustration. Not every story has a distinct ending. Obviously, the lives of the people I met are ongoing. Nor do all the stories fit neatly into the discrete subject matter of any particular chapter. I have, therefore, sometimes told one part of a family's story in one chapter and another part elsewhere.

Family is important to the people I met and children are the most important family members. Low-income people understand that their children represent the future. They recognize the value in, indeed the necessity of, their children finishing school. The most fervent wish of many is for their children to go to college.

College for a child who has to lie in bed while her mother washes her only pair of jeans seems as far away as the trip from Abe Lincoln's cabin to the White House. Nonetheless, when a low- income child drops out of school, it is not for lack of parental support. Too many times that child has been driven out by lack of money to meet the expenses of a "free" education or by the adolescent shame of dressing differently or, indeed, of being different.

Governmental programs which enhance the ability of low-income parents to become more self-sufficient can and do work. A dozen or so of the mothers I interviewed had themselves taken on the challenge of furthering their education. Their motivations varied. One GED- candidate told me, "I don't want my kids to say, 'Well, mother, I'm going to quit school because you did.'" Others, particularly those in vocational and college classes, expect to one day find employment that will pay more than the minimum wage. Some want to be nurses or teachers. All of them look forward to lives in which they will not be dependent on the government.

In summary, the people I met live in difficult circumstances and have had many difficult experiences. They and their children have known hunger. They have gone without coats or shoes. For lack of rent, they have been evicted from homes that were substandard to begin with. They have lost jobs for lack of transportation or childcare. They have sat up nights with a sick child who needed medical attention they could not afford. But they have not given up. They believe in their children and dream of a better tomorrow. They are not poor in spirit.

> "People should be the most prime thing the state owns," Donna Ankrom said.
>
> "They should," Lisa Wheeler chimed in. "Our children should be counted as a resource."
>
> "They should be counted as a resource," Donna agreed, "not as a liability, not as a deficit or not as anything else, just a resource.
>
> "Today's kids won't want to help others if they're not helped as kids. I would not be a child of today's world," Donna concluded thoughtfully.
>
> *Exchange between two Carter County residents, August 3, 1988.*

1 LIFE BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES

Comments and Recommendations

"I'm hoping to be able to get off welfare... I know I can do better." Elaine Roberts made that statement to me at a shelter for abused women in Northern Kentucky. At the time, Elaine did not realize she was the first person I had interviewed. Similarly, I did not know how her sentiment would be repeated by virtually every other "welfare mother" I interviewed.

The same day I interviewed Elaine Roberts, I also spoke with two women at Welcome House, a shelter for homeless women and children in Covington. "I don't plan on staying on welfare," said a 35-year-old black woman, "Just a little while 'til I get a job." Similarly, a white woman, just seventeen years of age, claimed emphatically "I'm not staying on welfare. There's no way!"

As I went from Northern Kentucky to Southeast and Central Kentucky, to Eastern Kentucky, to Northeast Kentucky, and finally to Western Kentucky, it was the same. Some welfare recipients accept their status with shame, some with resignation, and others with anger and frustration. But no one I met wanted to receive benefits under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, popularly known as welfare. "I wasn't used to it. I used to be so ashamed," said a Wayne County mother when she became eligible for AFDC.

Others, who live with the fathers of their children or who have minimum-wage jobs, may be just as poor as a welfare recipient. Under current law, they do not qualify for AFDC. They may, however, be eligible for food stamps or a Medicaid card. They, too, feel shame at their status. "They gave us food stamps, her and I," said a Christian County mother, referring to her daughter and herself, "but it hurts to get them."

AFDC Benefits Are Low

Payments under the AFDC program are abysmally low, even with the five percent annual increase appropriated by the Regular Session of the 1988 Kentucky General Assembly for 1988 and 1989. Kentucky's grants are based on a "standard of need," which is the amount of money the state assumes a family must have to meet its basic needs. Kentucky has set its standard of need at very low levels. Thus Kentucky's AFDC grants — which are 100 percent of the standard of need — are low. "AFDC payments," says a Carter County resident, are "not enough to give up your dignity, your self respect, and to give up your self worth." As the chart below shows, the current payments range from 27 to 29 percent of the federal poverty guideline:

Number Eligible in Family	Kentucky's Monthly AFDC Grant	Percent of Federal Poverty Guideline
2	$ 188	29%
3	$ 218	27%
4	$ 272	28%
5	$ 319	28%
6	$ 360	28%
7	$ 401	27%

A child in Harlan County, Kentucky

Contrary to a popular myth, the increments for additional children are too small to make motherhood a profitable enterprise. As a woman from Wolfe County explained, her monthly check was increased between $26 and $27 when her second child was born two years ago. "That did him two weeks [on diapers] on what money they gave me to keep him for a whole month. That did not include his milk, his formula. It did not include his clothing. It did not include his medicine. That bought him a box of pampers."

Nor did I find any women who contrived to increase their welfare grants by crossing state lines. Kentucky shares boundaries with seven other states, all of which have more generous welfare benefits. "I'm from Kentucky," they would say, with an honesty and a loyalty that seemed crystal clear to them. "I wouldn't feel right moving to another state." In short, I did not meet any "welfare cheats."

Most Two-Parent Households Are Excluded from AFDC

The exclusion of almost all two-parent families from Kentucky's AFDC program is troubling. Kentucky is not among the 27 states that currently participate in the AFDC-Unemployed Parent program (AFDC-UP). The program provides benefits to intact two-parent families if both parents are unemployed.

1988 Poverty Income Guidelines for all States (except Alaska and Hawaii) and the District of Columbia*

Size of Family Unit	Poverty Guideline
1	$ 5,770
2	7,730
3	9,690
4	11,650
5	13,610
6	15,570
7	17,530
8	19,490

For family units with more than 8 members, add $1,960 per additional member.

** From 53 Federal Register 4214, February 12, 1988.*

In Kentucky, unless a man is disabled, his wife cannot live with him and remain eligible for AFDC. Under a federal law which will become effective in October of 1990, all states must provide AFDC payments to families with two unemployed parents. In return, one parent will be required to spend sixteen hours per week in job training or unpaid community service at least six months of the year.

Currently, desperate families sometimes separate to entitle their children to the meager AFDC check. Unwed parents delay marriage, perhaps permanently, to remain eligible. For those couples that marry or stay together, the cost is high: the right to a medical card may be lost and the AFDC money that might have gone for clothing, rent, utilities, or soap never enters the family budget.

> "There's a lot of things that could be done to help people. Like when there's no work, help people through those hard months, at least 'til winter's over with. You can't do nothing, you can't get out. How do you live? Barely."
>
> *Harlan County mother, August 15, 1988*

Compounding Factors

The problems that go hand in hand with poverty are compounded for families in which a child has a disability, or in which a spouse or child has suffered physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. These families face not only the burdens of stretching an inadequate income to pay for food, shelter, and clothing; they also must cope with the extra responsibilities caused by the special needs of family members.

The lack of transportation also has a multiplier effect on low-income families. They are forced to shop at the nearest store. "There's this one store [in town]. It's the biggest ripoff," a woman in Eastern Kentucky told me. Without a way to get to shopping centers where major grocery chains operate, the woman must spend her food stamps at an overpriced convenient store. I was amazed at

A food stamp center in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

prices when I stopped at a Mini-Mart half way up a mountain in Letcher County. A gallon of milk cost $3.40, nearly double the price at major groceries in Louisville.

Following divorce, child support payments after the first $50 are credited to the state's AFDC budget, and never reach the mother or children except in the unlikely event that they exceed the amount of the AFDC grant. William E. Mains, of the Northeast Kentucky Legal Services office in Morehead, sometimes represents low-income women in divorce cases. When feasible, he asks that the ex-husband agree to pay utility bills instead of maintenance. Such an arrangement can insure that the children and ex-wife have heat and light. It also means the payment is not counted as "income," thus helping the wife qualify for AFDC and other social service programs. Many custodial parents, of course, never receive court-ordered child support at all despite recent intensification in the state's efforts to assist parents in collecting child support.

Anna Norton and family in their Madison County trailer.

The Medicaid Link

If there is any incentive to remain on welfare, it is probably the automatic eligibility for Medicaid, a program that pays for most — but not all — medical visits and medicines. Elaine Roberts explained that her son's chronic bronchitis and her own asthma were major stumbling blocks to her leaving the AFDC rolls. A high school graduate, she has worked as a secretary and would like to do so again. However, a secretary's salary is "still not enough" she says, particularly with a son who may need medical attention several times a month.

Low-income parents who find jobs are most likely to find employment that pays only the minimum wage of $3.35 an hour, a wage that has not increased since January 1, 1980. Half of the 16 million new jobs created in the last eight years were at wages at or below the poverty level for a family of four. The take-home pay on a 40-hour-a-week minimum wage job in Kentucky is $115.26 for a single parent with two dependents. Often such jobs are seasonal or part-time. Chances are slim that they will provide any benefits at all and particularly not health insurance, which may cost $200 a month or more for family coverage.

Women like Lisa Wheeler of Carter County are caught in an incredible bind. She works 30 hours a week at a minimum-wage job to support herself, an unemployed husband, and her sons who are seven and twelve. If she worked fifteen more

minutes a week or made one cent more an hour, her children would no longer be eligible for Medicaid. Her sons are sicker than other children, particularly in the winter, because her home is so drafty. She cannot afford to lose the medical card, yet her part-time minimum wage salary barely sustains the family.

Finding affordable, decent child care is another almost impossible task for many families. In rural Kentucky, few day care centers operate. For example, the yellow pages for Floyd County, which has more than 50,000 residents, list only four day care centers. Nowhere are there enough quality centers with fees a minimum-wage worker can afford. In urban areas of the state, the cost of child care for two preschoolers easily equals the take-home pay of a minimum-wage worker.

They See A Future

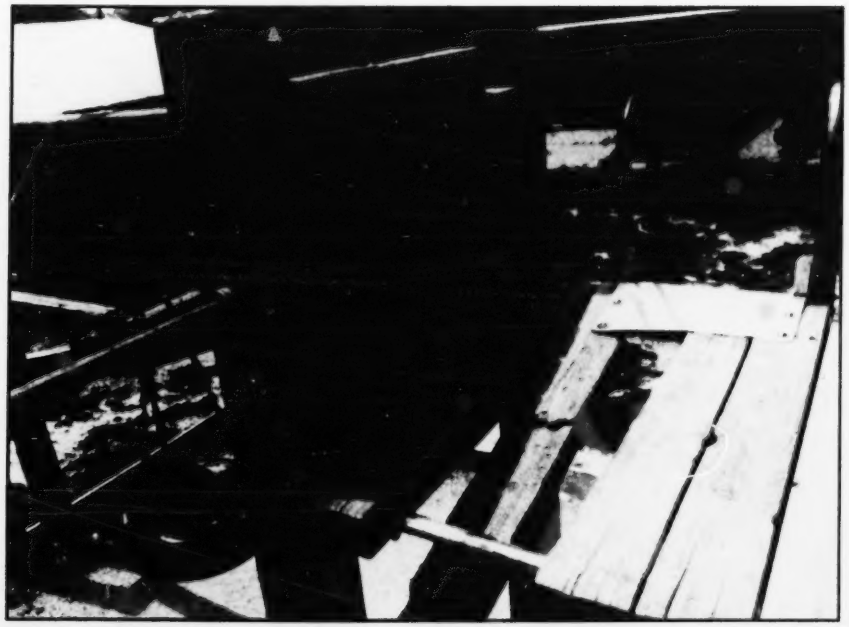
In spite of the odds against breaking out of the cycles of welfare and poverty, low income parents keep dreaming of becoming employed and achieving independence. They expect to live in more decent housing. They want to own cars and be able to give their children money to go roller skating or to a movie. They push their children to stay in school. They push themselves to earn GEDs and enroll in college. They see a future for themselves where outside observers might not. With changes in the welfare system, more recipients might realize their dreams and might do so more quickly. The following changes would enhance the ability of AFDC recipients and other low-income families to become more independent.

- Kentucky should expand Medicaid coverage to recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) who become employed. Without Medicaid coverage, such employees may be forced to quit their jobs and return to the AFDC rolls if they cannot afford needed health care for themselves or a child.

> "I am glad there are things that help, but you have to swallow your pride. They gave us food stamps, her and I, but it hurts to get them. And it hurts even more when someone says — and I hear them say it — 'Our good earned tax dollars are going to feed this one and that one.' It digs all the way into you."
>
> *Emily Williams, discussing her feelings about accepting governmental assistance for herself and her fifteen-year-old daughter, Christian County, September 14, 1988.*

- Kentucky should subsidize childcare costs of all recipients of AFDC who become employed. Subsidies should remain available to the extent needed so long as the recipient is employed. The cost of childcare for two preschool aged children very nearly equals the net income of a minimum-wage worker. Without childcare subsidies, many AFDC recipients will be unable to join the workforce.

- Even before federal legislation requires the state to include two-parent households in the AFDC program beginning in October of 1990, Kentucky should offer AFDC benefits to two-parent families. Without such coverage, two-parent families may separate to entitle their children to benefits. Children in two-parent families may suffer because their parents cannot afford to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.



A playground behind public housing located in Jefferson County, Kentucky.

- Kentucky should gradually raise its "standard of need" to equal the federal poverty guideline so that AFDC grants would equal the federal poverty guideline. The standard is the amount of money the state assumes a family must have to meet its basic needs. Because Kentucky's standard is low, Kentucky's AFDC grants are low. Presently, both are approximately one-third of the federal poverty guideline. If the standard of need were raised, low-income families would have more of the resources they need.

- Kentucky should assist more AFDC recipients to secure jobs by developing training and counseling programs tailored to their needs. Most AFDC recipients want to work but lack credentials and skills that would enable them to secure decent jobs.

- Kentucky should continue its recent intensification of efforts to collect child support from non-custodial parents. The receipt of child support could lift a custodial parent and their children out of poverty. The state should help children obtain all the resources to which they are entitled, including child support.

A Glimpse of a Hitchhiker

Early on a hot August morning last summer, I picked up a hitchhiker in Harlan County. I had not given a stranger a lift since my kid brother stopped thumbing rides two decades ago. The man I picked up looked to be in his late twenties. He was walking slowly along a country road that wound around a mountain. His hair was long, his face, hands, and clothes, dirty.

The bandana around his forehead had once been red, but now was faded to almost the color of his sunbaked face. His jeans were torn at the knees and ragged at the cuffs and his shoes were dusty. He was tall and muscular but looked awkward, as if he had not quite grown into his body.

I leaned over to the window on the passenger's side, stretching across my three-year-old son and his carseat, to speak to the hitchhiker. "How far are you going?" I asked, studying the lines of his face.

"Just a little piece up the road, mam," he replied politely. I stretched again and unlocked a back door, motioning for him to join us. He sat down gingerly, nervously.

"This sure is a nice car," he said quietly, admiring the late-model red Cavalier my office had rented for my trip to eastern Kentucky. I almost felt I should apologize for what appeared to be great personal wealth, but instead I simply said, "Thank you." "Do you know where I can get any work, mam?" the hitchhiker then asked.

"I'm afraid I'm not from around here," I said. "I really don't know. But what kind of work do you want?"

"I'll do anything," he said, awkwardly clasping his strong brown hands together. "I'll try anything."

"Is there much farm work around here?" I asked.

"Not this year. The crops didn't grow. It's been too dry."

I said nothing. I had been hearing about the lack of farm work in rural Kentucky all summer.

As we approached a mail box on the right, he said, "You can let me off up there."

I stopped and he opened the door, bending over carefully to get out. I do not know if he was heading home or planning to ask for work at the small deteriorating frame house opposite the mailbox. I do not know much of anything about the man. I do know that he wanted work and I do know that he was willing to try anything.

Emma Washington's Story

"We're a seasonal farmwork house- hold," Emma Washington explained, as we talked in the Northeast Kentucky Legal Services Office in Morehead, Kentucky, in early August. I heard from her — as I had from so many others — about the devastating impact of the 1988 drought on low-income families in rural Kentucky.

"I've got to constantly keep my mind moving on how I'm going to survive...the next day, the next little bit, how I'm going to get this or that," says Emma Washington of Barth County.

"We don't own a farm . . . and this year, we are hit very, very hard," Emma told me.

"They," she said, referring to farmers who previously had offered work to families like hers, "don't need us. There is so many people that don't have work right now. It's the worst year we had in I don't know how long.

"They think we don't want to work. We do want to work. We don't have nothing to work at. If something ain't done before the end of this year, how are we going to make it through the winter?" Emma asked rhetorically.

"We have got to give the people some hope," she said, referring to other low- income families in northeast rural Kentucky. "You can't punish a person that tries. I have worked. Look at the blisters on my hand where I have chopped out 'bacco," she said, showing me the palms of her stained, raw, blistered hands.

> "There are a lot of wringers [washing machines] in Bath County because you can wash everything in the same water and save on soap."
>
> *Emma Washington*
> *Bath County*
> *August 3, 1988*

Emma, her husband George and their three children live in Bath County, Kentucky. Shortly before our interview, George M. Washington, 36 years old and with a sixth grade education, had cleared some land, or, as Emma put it, "cut three hills. I don't mean bushes," Emma said. "Him and another man done it. The other man fell and hurt his arm. George ended up clearing $12.50."

Everyone, including Cindy, age thirteen, and the six-year-old twins, Chrissy and Caroline, pitched in to keep the family afloat last

summer. One blisteringly hot day, Emma and her daughters found work picking blueberries for a major grocery chain.

"I picked — me and all of us — picked blueberries all day from 10 a.m. til 7 o'clock at night and made $10.50. My oldest made $3. We got $13.50 for the day [the four of them]. They paid $3 a crate and it takes at least two hours, if you pick fast, to get a crate."

Emma let the oldest girl keep her $3.50 and she paid the twins for their long hours in the sun, too.

"You know what the kids did with their money?" Emma asked me a little later.

"What?" I said, trying to imagine.

Her voice conveyed sadness and hurt as she said, "Bought groceries."

Because of the drought, the family is surviving — barely — on jobs like blueberry picking, George's work clearing three hills, and food stamps.

Emma is a proud woman. She does not want to be dependent on the government, but she can never get far enough ahead to be independent. Like so many others I met, Emma believed her family would have a chance at self-sufficiency if only there were a transition period before they were totally cut from social service programs.

"Once you get behind, you're always behind," she said.

"If you make any money at all, they take your food stamps away. If they would let you carry them for six months, you could get ahead. They don't give you a chance to get ahead."

Food stamps usually do not go far enough, most people told me, even if a family has a garden. Gardens this past summer produced poorly because of the heat and the lack of rain. Garden or not, food stamps do not pay for soap, sanitary products, toilet paper, deodorant, insect spray, and other items most people put on their "grocery list."

"At the end of the month, unless you've got work, you don't have nothing to wash your clothes in," Emma said. The holiday months are the hardest to get through.

"Christmas, Thanksgiving are all real good holidays," Emma told me. "But they're a horror for poor people. Christmas comes at the end of the month. If you cook Christmas dinner or if you get the kids any candy or anything extra, you don't eat the last week of the month. That's it. You have no milk, no bread, usually no oil. These are basic things, nothing to cook with."

Essentially, Emma Washington's concerns are like those of other parents, providing for their families. Yet her poverty and the emotional strain it engenders give a dimension to Emma Washington's fears and hopes that most parents never experience.

"But you've got to go on. You've got to keep a pushing," Emma Washington concluded. It has been the motto of her life.

Carolyn Wright's Story

"I know there are people who abuse the welfare system, but there is nothing more degrading to me than food stamps and welfare and a medical card." Carolyn Wright underscored her statement by relating an incident that occurred to her when she tried to buy cereal for her son through the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

> "[My boyfriend] told me that he knew of this girl and she was really good with kids and she babysits and I took Stephen to her. I dropped him off and he picked him up. Stephen came back and then he had to go to the bathroom and when I was getting ready to put him on the pot, I noticed he had a welt mark across the lower part of his back. She [the babysitter] tried to tell me that he had fallen off the bed — that her little boy pushed him off the bed. You don't get a welt mark from falling off a bed, a bruise maybe, but not a welt mark."
>
> *Louise Gardner,*
> *23-year-old Northern*
> *Kentucky mother,*
> *May 31, 1988*

"One week I went up here to [a local grocery]," she began. "I got Trix cereal. Roger really likes it. He eats it for a snack. There was a sign under it, 'WIC approved.'

"The next week I went back and this girl, she knows the family, she says 'That's not on the vouchers.'

"I said, 'I got it last month over here on the vouchers.'

"She said, 'I don't care if you did, it's not on the vouchers. You'll have to take it back and get another kind.' There were a lot of people back there waiting to be checked out. My face was red. So finally I had to take the cereal back.

"So she yells across the store, the store's full of people, 'She's trying to get Trix on the voucher!' I could have crawled in a knot hole. I was so embarrassed," Carolyn continued.

"I told mama, 'I will never go in her line again.' I had to take it back and get Kix."

Carolyn hopes that eventually she will earn enough that she will no longer need food stamps to feed her two children and herself. She is employed and earns more than minimum wage. However, her annual income is so low that she continues to qualify for food stamps.

Last June, Carolyn Wright began a job as a keypunch operator, earning $3.95 per hour. Her 30 weeks of training for the position were provided through a program for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

Carolyn had been on the job a little more than a month when we had a cup of coffee together at Druthers in Campton, Kentucky, one foggy morning last July. Although the topics we discussed were quite serious, our conversation was relaxed. Carolyn Wright is a person whose sense of humor has helped her deal with life. She is quick to smile and not afraid to laugh.

"We have to have 12,500 keystrokes per hour whenever we come out of probation," she said, describing her work. "If your keystrokes don't go up, if your error rate doesn't stay down, then you're let go. Basically you sign a paper when you go in there that says they can let you go anytime they want you to or else they will not hire you. So far I've got along really well," she told me. "I even earned incentive pay twice. The first time I got $1.25 and the second time four cents," she said, laughing.

> "Raising the minimum wage won't help. They'll just hire you part-time."
>
> *Sharon Zimmerman, Director*
> *Family Service Society, Inc.*
> *September 14, 1988*

> "My parents raised me to believe you work for what you get. If you don't have it, you do without. You don't spend frivolously. It makes a better person to work. It makes you stronger inside, do you know what I mean?"
>
> *Mary Carter, an AFDC recipient from Daviess County, explaining why she is a student at Owensboro Business College, September 13, 1988.*

Carolyn drives more than an hour each way to get from her home in Wolfe County to her job in Lee County. She has been commuting with a friend, but the friend will be resigning soon. She has not figured out how she will travel to and from work when her friend leaves. Carolyn has no car and cannot make a car payment on her $140 per week gross income.

Carolyn's budget and schedule also are complicated by the fact that she has a son, Roger, who is almost two. Although Carolyn was awarded $25 per week in child support, her ex-husband has not complied with the court order. He owes over $2,100. "The court system makes everything look really nice on paper," she said, "but it's never enforced."

Her former husband receives Social Security Insurance because of a disability. Carolyn thinks it should be possible to garnish his

monthly SSI check. She also would like to see the state adopt a policy whereby they would pay an amount equal to a child support order if the former spouse failed to make child support payments.

Carolyn's ex-husband continues to harass her and Eileen. "We've been shot at. I can't prove it," she said, "but he shot at Eileen out in the yard one night."

In spite of her stressful life, sixteen-year-old Eileen makes straight A's and is in the Beta Club, an honor society. Her mother is "working on her to go to college. We've got to check into some grants or loans. If I can't get her to college, I want her to go to trade school," Carolyn told me.

Carolyn Wright prefers to look forward rather than backward. "Everyday I know more of what I want. I know more of who I am. I know what I want for my kids, and what I don't want for my kids," she said. She has high hopes that she can realize those wants. She has made a great deal of progress already.

The Story of Pauline and Donald Miles

The nine children range in age from 17 years to 19 months and are their parents' most precious possessions. I met all but the oldest three during an interview at the family's Madison County home in June.

The father, Donald Miles, was to celebrate his fortieth birthday the week after our conversation. His thirteen- year-old son, John, was teasing him about the approaching milestone. Apparently Donald was used to being teased. "When I married Pauline, I was 21. She was 16. They teased me over that, said it was robbing the cradle," he told me laughing.

Pauline smiled as Donald talked, but seemed glad to let her husband speak for both of them. Concern for their children was the thread that ran through all Donald's comments and responses to my questions.

Donald Miles with three of his children. The Christian Appalachian Project has made possible the remodeling of the Miles' Madison County home.

"I love all my children," he told me several times. "We have hard times sometimes and don't have the things we need, which we get help, you know, from food stamps. I wish we didn't have to. It's hard to make enough money to, well, feed three people, let alone this many. But I enjoy my family, my children. I really love my children."

As we talked, several of the children sat next to their father on an old couch, which was positioned under a new window in the family's living room. The children listened intently as their father spoke, looking directly at him and often unconsciously mimicking whatever expression his face took on. One leaned on him, another held his hand, and all of them seemed to enjoy being close to him. It was clear to me that their father's love was returned in full measure.

The Miles' house is at the end of a dusty, rutted dirt drive which is several hundred yards in length. The house is being remodeled and enlarged, thanks to help from the Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) in Berea. The job is one of the biggest remodeling projects CAP has undertaken. CAP decided to become involved, in part because Donald Miles already had purchased much of the material that was needed. Also, Donald, who supports his family with carpentry and concrete work, contributes his own labor to the remodeling project.

Donald Miles' hands are calloused and the muscles in his arms, well developed. He obviously is a man who works with his hands and works hard. The family's yard is strewn with building materials and supplies from Donald's efforts. Getting through the yard and up the wooden stairs to the side entrance was a bit like following an obstacle course. "We need to get a dozer and fill in the holler," he explained.

Some of the rooms in the house were framed in but lacked drywall. I was surprised that the bathroom was one of these. It did not have even a drape or curtain to provide privacy. When my son asked to use the bathroom, one of the Miles' girls escorted him to the privy outside, I realized that the plumbing was not yet hooked up.

"John, his eyes is bad," Donald told me, as we began discussing health. "We bought him glasses with the medical card."

> "Grandma, there's a man out there with vegetables on a cart!" said five- year-old Kendra. Her words were uttered as she burst into the darkened kitchen where I was talking with two public housing tenants. The lack of light made the kitchen cooler and would lower the utility bill at the end of the month.
>
> "It's two watermelons for a dollar!" Kendra continued in an eager voice. She was so excited she was hugging herself, swaying, and shifting her weight from one foot to the other.
>
> "Can I buy one?" she asked with a big smile.
>
> "Does he take food stamps?" her grandmother replied quietly. "I don't have any money. I gave it all to your mother when she drove to Frankfort today [to take an examination for a state job]."
>
> Not yet without hope, Kendra inquired in a sweet, longing voice, "Do you think they take food stamps?" Her eyes widened as she awaited her grandmother's answer. Kendra then rushed back out, practically tripping in her haste to find out if the farmer accepted food stamps. We heard the door swinging open as she came back in a few moments later. The farmer had already gone.
>
> *Exchange at a Johnson County home, August 17, 1988*

"They said I couldn't get AFDC because I didn't have a divorce yet. They said I could get it if I divorced him."

Candy Douglas
Floyd County
August 17, 1988

"Do your glasses help you see?" I asked John, who seemed pleased to be the object of attention.

"They help me all right, but they're scratched up and I can't see," he replied. I looked at his glasses and quickly understood his comment. Unfortunately, the family no longer has a medical card. With the father in the home, a family of eleven can have an annual income of no more than $8,800 to qualify for the state's Medical Assistance program.

Earl Lee, who is eight, had an ear infection when I visited. The ear was red and "hurts when you touch it," the boy told me. His parents were out of the nonprescription painkiller they previously had used to help him. They did not know how or when they would obtain more.

"I would like for people who run the food stamp program to walk through a store with food stamps and pay for their groceries and let people look at them, the way they look at us. They start talking different when you hand them food stamps."

Floyd County woman who is attending Prestonsburg Community College in the hopes she can one day live without governmental assistance, August 17, 1988.

Donald and Pauline Miles believe in doctors though they rarely can afford to visit one. Donald recalled that he seldom was taken to the doctor as a child. "When I was a child, I'd get sick," he told me. "I'd hardly go to the doctor, which I believe in doctors, don't get me wrong. I don't know whether I had a fear about them or what and I still don't go much, unless it's absolutely a have-to case or I think it's something my children might catch. I worry about my children and then, I know if I'm sick too long, I can't work for my children."

"I never have canned but I'm going to try this year. Mason jars and lids are not on food stamps. That's what's holding me back now."

Carter County woman, August 3, 1988

When our conversation ended, everyone but Pauline agreed to be photographed. Unfortunately, my pictures were too dark. Therefore, when I was in Madison County a month later, I arranged to visit the Miles' family again. Progress had been made on the addition, but a lot more work was needed if the work was to be completed by winter.

During my second visit, Donald was wearing a hat imprinted with the message "What the world needs now is Jesus." He mentioned, as he had during our first conversation, his faith in the Lord. "The Lord's been with me all my life," he explained. Donald Miles hopes that his children will "grow up and be Christians."

Donald also has other ideas about his children's future. "I'd like for them to get a good education, good enough that they can get a

decent job and have a good living, not be rich, but just have a good living, better than I've got." If Donald's love for them can help his children obtain that education and job and good living, his dream for them surely will come true.

Cora Robertson's Story

Cora Robertson lives in a little town in Floyd County, so small that it appears on few maps. Cora is a quiet person, almost shy, but, like so many people I interviewed, she was "happy to help." I visited Cora with Donna Yellen, a staff person from the Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) office in Martin, Kentucky in Floyd County.

Cora Robertson with her two-year-old son in Floyd County, Kentucky

Our drive on the winding road from Donna's office to Cora's home that sunny August day had rocked my three-year-old son Joshua to sleep. As we pulled in the rutted driveway, Cora's children ran shouting to the CAP truck to greet us. We quickly gestured for them to lower their voices, pointing to Joshua. They were fascinated by the little boy sleeping in a carseat in their driveway and even more fascinated when they learned he was a twin.

"Are you going to wake him up?" they wanted to know.

"No," I replied in a friendly tone, "he needs his nap."

"Do you want us to watch him and tell you when he wakes up?" one of the older children asked eagerly. I nodded with thanks and went into the house. To get inside required some agility. CAP workers and volunteers — some working to repay loans from the organization — were hammering and sawing in what would soon become the Robertson's living room and indoor bathroom.

We stepped up on a large stone to enter the new living room and then walked through the construction into the existing living room In spite of the construction work, everything in the sparsely furnished living room was clean and tidy. A neatly pressed sheet had been placed carefully over the coal stove tocreate an extra table for the summer.

Conversation was difficult. The hammering and sawing in the next room was distracting. Occasionally, a worker would ask a question or want to show something to Cora. Every few minutes, one of Cora's children came dancing into the house to tell us "Joshua is still asleep!" or "I think Joshua might wake up soon!" Their exuberance and the interactions

between Cora and her children made it easy for a stranger to see the mutual love and respect within the family.

Besides the noise and interruptions, conversation was difficult because Cora seemed hesitant to talk with me. She answered every question but volunteered little additional information. Finally, she asked me whether our interview would jeopardize her right to her children! I was confused by her question at first — and all the more amazed that despite her concern for her children, she had been willing to be interviewed.

> "I try to hold back enough to where the kids can go roller-skating or somewhere like that. Something always comes up. My kids eat and eat and eat. It's gotten to where I have to holler at them for eating so much. 'Quit wasting it!' [They answer] 'Mom, we're not wasting it, we're eating it.'"
>
> *Floyd County mother, August 15, 1988*

"No, of course not," I reassured her, explaining again about the organization I worked for and the purpose of the report I was writing.

"It would kill me to lose my child," she said. "That's all I live for, my kids."

The reason for Cora's fear was an investigation by the Cabinet for Human Resources which had been precipitated by a report that the children were coming to school dirty. "They told me I needed to bath them," she said.

A social worker had given Cora the impression that unless she and her husband added a bathroom to their home, they could lose their children. Of 17,288 housing units in Floyd County, 1,210 lack indoor plumbing. The Christian Appalachian Project learned of the Robertson's plight about the time they received a donation that, with the use of volunteer labor, would almost cover the cost of the addition.

The **Christian Appalachian Project** (CAP) supports more than 50 projects which touch people in all of Kentucky's Appalachian counties and in six other states as well. Among CAP's programs are child development centers, youth centers, used clothing stores, spouse abuse shelters, home repair projects, and summer camps for children. Started in 1964 by Reverend Ralph Beiting, a Catholic priest, the interdenominational, privately funded organization is based in Lancaster, Kentucky, which is in Garrard County.

With each additional contact with a CAP program, volunteer, or staff member, my admiration for the organization grew. The half dozen CAP programs I visited are designed to promote self-help by low- income persons. Emergency loans, for example, are repaid by physical labor or other volunteer work. Skills are taught, education is promoted. The staff I met were, without exception, dedicated, sensitive, and caring. They did not seem to be introducing me to clients, but instead to friends. Their concerns for their clients were genuine concerns and not just the worries that might go along with a job.

It is my opinion that the Christian Appalachian Project is doing an extremely good job meeting its purpose "to sponsor programs to cut the roots of poverty and to promote the independence and dignity of Appalachians."

Cora's husband has worked for the past four years but his income barely covers the family's expenses. In some ways, the family is worse off because of Dan Robertson's employment. His employer does not provide health insurance and the family's income is too high to qualify for Medicaid. A recent emergency room bill for $82 had been devastating to the budget.

"Joshua's awake!" a child announced triumphantly, again interrupting our conversation. "Can we bring him inside?"

"Sure," I said and was amazed in a few moments as my normally shy son walked happily into a strange house holding the hand of a child he had never seen before. We talked a few minutes more and I have since corresponded with Cora Robertson. Her letter to me, confirming that I could write about her and use her photograph, was as gentle and kind as she had been in person.

The Story of a Foster Mother and Her Foster Daughter

"You've been a mom. You feel like you've left something out or could have done something more," Marie Maggard said, explaining why she had decided to become a foster parent. Marie's home is one of only two approved foster homes in Floyd County, Kentucky. Both homes are headed by single parents.

Marie has three children of her own, aged 14, 19, and 20. At first her children had mixed emotions about her decision. "They thought I was trying to replace them," she said.

She has been widowed fifteen years. To avoid having "pity parties" where she would feel sorry for herself, Marie has tried to reach out to other people. She works at the Christian Appalachian

> "This paper, does it get back to CHR [the state Cabinet for Human Resources]? What I get, I cannot afford to lose. It's not that I care personally about myself. My kids come first. Above all else, my kids is there. That's my main goal, to live just long enough to see my kids raised and maybe out of this. I don't want them to have to grow up and maybe go through the same thing that I have."
>
> *Harlan County mother, August 15, 1988*

Project office in Martin, Kentucky, and is studying part-time at Prestonsburg Community College. "I want to be a nurse," she said, "I'd like to treat people like I've *not* been treated."

Marie contributed her own labor to the construction work which enlarged her house to five bedrooms and two baths. Currently, every bedroom is filled. Janie and Ellen Poore, who are in foster care, each have a bedroom as do Marie's youngest child, her 85-year-old grandmother, and Marie herself.

At one time, Marie was a foster parent to all four of the Poore children. "Trying to feed ten a meal was hard! I also was working on my house at the time." The oldest Poore child, a sixteen-year-old boy, now lives with his father. The second oldest, a fourteen- year-old girl, has married. The younger two, Janie, age eleven, and Ellen, age six, remain in the home.

After I spoke with Marie Maggard, I had a conversation with Janie. Janie Poore has a sweet nature and an innocent look about her. She is petite, delicate, quiet, gentle. She was worried about a tire on her bike needing a patch when I chatted with her in July. The patch

"They say age has nothing to do with it. I believe it has. When I get a job, believe me, I'll be staying there until I can't work anymore. It is true, if I get just one good job, I don't intend to give it up. And I'm an honest person. There's no reason I couldn't keep it, once I get it.

"I've been offered work at night. I refused it. She's [her fifteen-year-old daughter] a good girl. I want to keep her that way. If I'm not there, there isn't anyone around who can help her make a decision, you understand. That doesn't mean I don't trust the child. Truthfully, I don't trust people and why put that responsibility on her? She needs me there."

Emily Williams, 55-year-old mother, recently separated from a violent husband, describing her quest for work, Christian County, September 14, 1988.

was a worry Marie Maggard was totally ready to address.

Neither Marie nor Janie knew, however, how they would deal with a much larger issue: Janie's future living arrangements. According to Marie, "Janie loves her mother and wants to be with her."

Janie's mother, however, has remarried and has a new baby. They live in the home of "Gramps," a relative of her new husband. Janie's mother and stepfather care for the relative and "live off his check." Gramps does not want Janie and her sister to move in.

Janie does not want to live with her father. She does not trust him to take care of her. "My sister and I were walking along the road one day and my dad fell down the mountain," she told me.

"He fell down?" I asked, not understanding.

"He was drunk," she said simply, relating an experience that life should never have dealt to children, then aged ten and five.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"We went on home and a relative called the Social Services office. We became foster children." Several people in Floyd County told me that state social workers there try to keep families together whenever possible. Thus, it was unusual for the four children to be removed immediately.

However, the children were returned to their father last summer. "He lay in the street drunk," Marie told me, and it was not long before they were back in foster care.

"They shouldn't give us back," Janie told me quietly. "They are going to give us back to try again. He's been in for treatment." Both Janie and, her sister Ellen, have medical problems that Marie attributes to their stressful lives.

"The part that really is the hardest is when they want to do something special in school. You can't afford to go out and buy a new outfit or something. You do the best you can. You say, 'I can't promise you. I'll think about it.' Then, we all get our heads together and say, 'How in the world are we going to do this?'"

Cynthia Smithers, McCracken County mother September 14, 1988

When the Poore girls leave, Marie will open her home to other children in foster care. She appreciates the training sessions the state offers to foster parents although she would like to have more instruction on "everyday problems."

Marie cares deeply about Janie and Ellen. They return her affection readily. I regret that my photographs of them did not turn out, though they are easy to remember, simply because of their warmth.

When Janie and I finished our conversation, I asked her if I could take her picture.

She did not answer immediately and then asked, "Do I have to smile?"

"No," I told her, "you don't have to smile."

"At the end of any month, the last week of the month, most people, it would be a nightmare to them if they had to live. If officials could come and stay one week, the last week of the month, if they could stay with any person who's low income, they would really see a whole lot of differences if they had to eat what we eat. They couldn't bring nothing with them. We have no toliet paper. We use newspaper and old rags. In hot weather like this, you get raw, very irritated and nothing to put on it."

Emma Washington, 36-year-old mother in a "seasonal farmwork household" in Bath County, August 3, 1988.

Glenda Simmon's Story

"You'll hear them say 'Mommy and Daddy fight, they can't live together.' And they can understand that, but for about the first six months, it was, 'Mommy, why'd you kick Daddy out?' and 'Mommy, why'd you do that to Daddy?' and 'Mommy loves you' and 'Mommy, Daddy wants to go back with you.'"

The above comment was made in the course of an interview of Glenda Simmons, the "mommy" in the above quotation at the YWCA Spouse Abuse Center in Jefferson County. She had been a resident there twice during 1987. I've included one episode form Glenda's life that illustrates the extra stress abused women may experience.

In addition to the challenges presented by being a low-wage working single parent, Glenda goes to bed each night knowing her children have been deeply troubled by the abuse and the breakup of the home. Kara, age five, and Jimmy, three-and-one-half years of age, no longer ask their mother to reunite with their father.

"Marriage was something we both said we were only going to do once," but from the first day of married life, Frank was abusive.

"At least we tried," Glenda said of their eight-year marriage. "That's all you can do."

Now she is trying to survive financially as well as help her children recover from the trauma of witnessing an abusive relationship. I asked Glenda if Joe, her ex-husband had abused Kara or Jimmy.

"Physically, no," she answered, "but emotionally, it tore them up.

Glenda Simmons with Jimmy, age three, and Kara, age five, at home in Jefferson County, Kentucky. (Photo by Don Cull)

"I just worry about them emotionally. They're going through a lot," Glenda told me. "I want them to come out of it with as little damage as possible."

Regardless of his past abuse, Glenda was not prepared for her ex-husband's "gift" on her twenty-sixth birthday last December. Previously, Joe had told Glenda that he had hired a private investigator.

"He had told me my telephones were bugged and he gave me a couple tapes to prove it. He told me what he [the private investigator] looked like and what he was driving, that he was a part-time police officer, that he gave Joe the stuff to bug the house with, that he followed me everywhere.

"On my birthday I went back to my mom's and we had a little birthday celebration just me and the kids and my mom. When I left there it was about 9 o'clock. I was going back to the Y [YWCA Spouse Abuse Shelter] and I pulled out on Frankfort Avenue. I got pulled over by this private investigator and he arrested me and he took my kids to Home of the Innocents [a private Jefferson County shelter for children] and he released them to Joe. He took me to jail and charged me with about six counts.

"I got out of jail that night and the next morning, we all appeared in court for the emergency custody hearing. I was slapped with all these charges of reckless driving, running a stop sign, expired tags, eluding an officer, propositioning an officer. It looked real bad. It looked like they had a real bad mother." Pending resolution of Glenda's criminal charges, the judge put the children back in Home of the Innocents for ten days.

"It was real strange," she told me. "I came back here [the YWCA Spouse Abuse Shelter] just in tears. Meanwhile the judge

> "I really can't find anybody dependable. I would like to see daycare for low- income women who are willing to get out there and help themselves."
>
> *Rose Wheeler, 31-year-old mother of three, Fayette County, August 2, 1988.*

> "To raise kids, you've got to have an awful lot of money. This $218 [a monthly AFDC grant] don't even stretch. I added up all my bills and it come up to $309."
>
> *Sandra Allen, 22-year-old mother, Fayette County, August 2, 1988.*

called the Spouse Abuse Shelter and said I could pick up the children. I thought of taking them somewhere where nobody could find them," she confessed, "but I thought everything was okay." It was not.

That evening, she was scheduled to work. At the time, her only income, about $100 a week, was from teaching aerobics and gymnastics classes. She had two classes that evening from 6 until 8 o'clock.

"Well, during the middle of my second class, I got a call from one of the crisis counselors. 'Glenda, don't worry, but the police just arrived here with Joe's attorney and they took the kids back to Home of the Innocents.'

"It was real bad," she said. "They're real scared of policemen because of the fact that police took me to jail and my daughter rode off in the car screaming and crying with these two cops during the first incident — that was at 10 o'clock on my birthday on the tenth. Then the very next day on the eleventh, it happened all over again."

Glenda ultimately received temporary custody of the children after a six-hour hearing. Joe has visitation every weekend. "I do want them to be with him because they love him and he loves them.

"Now, he's just like a Disneyland dad," she told me, conveying some of the helplessness she feels at her financial status. Her ex-husband has moved into his parents' home and is in the process of selling a business he and Glenda started. He has few expenses, other than the $100 weekly child support he pays and the $95 he contributes each month toward childcare.

"He's showering them with things," she said. "They put their daddy on a pedestal."

In contrast, Glenda feels like she is always "pinching." Her budget does not allow for any luxuries. "The biggest problem I've had is making all the ends meet and never having anything extra for the kids. It's real sad because I don't have a lot to do with them, other than feed them, dress them, school them, bring them home, take a bath, and do it all over again. It's real hard for them."

Last year Glenda was trained to be an Emergency Medical Technician. She worked as an EMT, first in Bullitt County, and more recently, in Jefferson County. However, a few days before our conversation, Glenda had quit her current job and was looking for one with more manageable hours.

> "Most low-income people have low-income relatives and friends. It doesn't seem fair, but that's the way it is."
>
> *Irene Gooding, Administrator Tenants Services and Housing Counseling, Inc., Lexington September 28, 1988*

"I was working 60 and 70 hours a week and I just didn't have the time with my kids," she told me. "The company was a real small tight-knit family. When you did all that extra work, they treated you like a queen. They've always told me since I started there, 'You've got two small kids. We have single men that can do things if you can't work it out.'

"But when I'd say, like last week, I said, 'I cannot work this many hours this week, I've got two small children,' they just gave a hard way to go when I only wanted to work 40 hours. Lots of time, I'd have to call my ex-husband and say, 'I'm going to be late. Can you pick up the kids from school?' It caused a lot of problems."

> "As far as daycare is concerned, it's so hard, it is really hard. You have to look for a person who's willing to charge you $5 per day and you can't find that. Daycare centers, that's even worse. There are some daycare centers that charge $50 per week. You're more or less working to pay the babysitter."
>
> *Joyce Davis, 19-year-old mother living on $40 per week child support, Fayette County, August 28, 1988.*

A key to Glenda's holding her life together is childcare for Kara and Jimmy. Kara has just started kindergarten. Jimmy is in preschool. Fortunately, the school that Kara attends is one of eleven in Jefferson County which offers preschool for three, four, and five-year-old children. It also provides care between 7 in the morning and 6 in the evening.

> "I would like to go back to school. I would like to get a career and get out of the low-income bracket which I may always be in, but I don't want to have to get food stamps, or get AFDC. People look at you like you're dirt.
>
> "You can't afford to pay a babysitter and make enough money to pay rent, doctor bills and food because if you work full-time, they take away your medical card, they cut your food stamps drastically and it's not worth it, even though I want to get out and work.
>
> "Right now I can't anyway with him [her eight-week-old son] on this heart monitor because I can't pay for it if I worked. [In a couple years] I would hope either to go back to school or still be in school or at a good-paying job because I can't take a minimum wage job."
>
> *Karen Hines, 26-year-old former drug abuser, Fayette County, August 28, 1988.*

"The kids love it," Glenda told me with relief. The weekly fee for both children is $95. Joe pays the fee one week and Glenda pays the next three.

In addition to the usual costs of bringing up two children, Glenda owes her attorney a substantial sum. She recently received a bill for $6,800 for legal services from December 1987 through April 1988. She is hopeful that the court will require her ex-husband to pay the bill.

> "Good nutrition and a good self-image are my top priorities. You can't defeat a kid who's had them both. You might knock them down, but they get right back up."
>
> *Cleda Lawson, Director*
> *Cleda's Day Care Prestonsburg*
> *August 16, 1988*

If she finds a new job as an EMT that will not require overtime, Glenda will be able to survive financially and spend more time with her children.

Life is not easy for Glenda and her children. Still, she told me, "It's a lot better now. It's 100 percent better since the day when I left him, I just felt a whole world go off my shoulders."

The Cranks Creek Survival Center

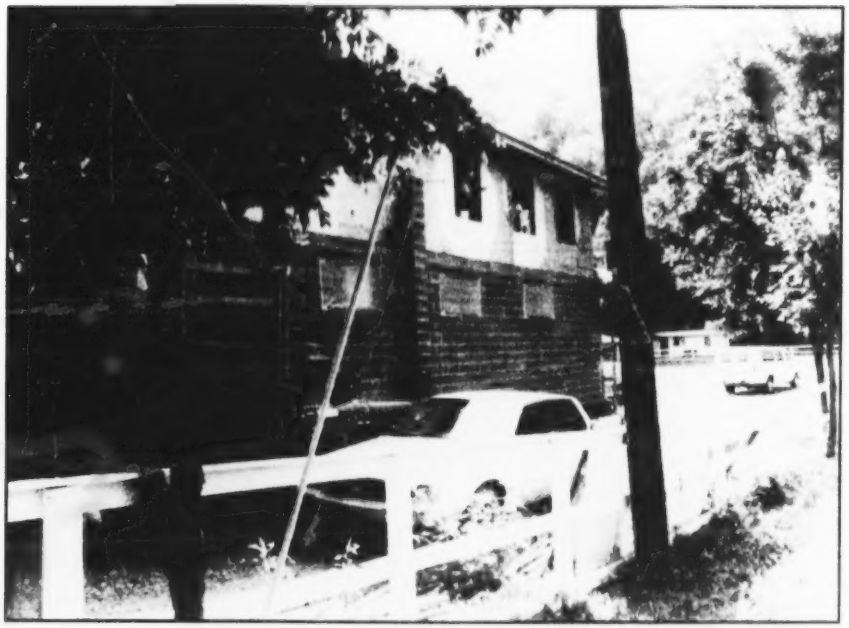
A few miles from the Virginia border in Harlan County, Kentucky, stands a half-finished concrete block building. Though it lacked electricity, windows and a floor when I visited in August, it was already packed with donated clothing and furniture. Becky Simpson, the 52-year-old unpaid director of the Cranks Creek Survival Center, expected the donated items to be gone within days. The per capita income in her county was $5,513 in 1983 and 41 percent of the county's children live in poverty.

Since they established the Center in 1981, Becky and her husband, Bobby, have been working seven days a week as the volunteer staff of the Cranks Creek Survival Center. Becky's work following three floods in 1977 "just gradually growed into the Center. Up 'til then, I done a lot of social work, but it was just like person-to-person," Becky explained in a National Public Radio interview last summer.

"I never dreamed I'd turn it into Cranks Creek Survival Center," she said. "I seed a hollow of us devastated. I felt a great need to see people get justice."

Today, the Center provides food, clothing, furniture, garden

The Cranks Creek Survival Center in Harlan County, Kentucky, brimming over with recent donations.



Volunteers from Florida painting Cranks Creek Survival Center's new building in August of 1988.

seeds, toys, books, and other items to needy people in the area. "It seems so good to have food and clothing and a piece of furniture to give away," Becky Simpson told me.

Becky, whose formal education ended in the third grade, speaks slowly, thoughtfully, and in quiet, kind tones. As we talked, her telephone rang repeatedly. Each time it was someone offering goods or asking for help. Her half of one telephone conversation started like this: "Honey, we ain't got too much food. I'd have to try and put you some together. We usually put together two A & P pokes full."

Becky Simpson was honored for herwork at the Center in the July 4, 1988, *Newsweek* story on America's unsung heroes. Since she was five years old Becky Simpson has had "an enormous dream" of helping others. She grew up "as poor as you can get. It was awful pitiful. [My father] and my mother worked every day and couldn't keep food in the house." Through the Center, she has met her dream to help others she says. Now, she simply hopes to continue her work and expand it. A newer goal is to purify the drinking water in her area, left unsafe after years of mining.

The Cranks Creek Survival Center depends heavily on volunteers. People from around the country come to the Center for a few days at a time, generally in the summer, to assist. Sometimes they repair homes or do clean-up work in the area. A church group from Florida was painting part of the new building when I was there.

Virtually all the AFDC recipients I interviewed who have young children have trouble fitting the expense of disposable diapers into their budgets. Packages of 96 medium store-brand diapers cost about $18. Most children probably would use one-and-a-half to two packages per month. Cloth diapers do not seem practical for most mothers I met. Not many recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), have their own washing machines and few have cars. Rural parents may not have running water. The few places diaper services are available they cost more than $40 per month.

"I've got applications in. The problem with me now is if I got a job, I'd have to have a babysitter. There's no daycare center here. That's what we definitely need. The closest one would be over at Robinson Creek about fourteen miles from here."

Floyd County mother
August 16, 1988

At least until the new building is completed, the Center will continue to use its original building, a four-room frame house. In all likelihood, Becky Simpson's home and telephone will continue to be the strategic center for the many services provided by the Cranks Creek Survival Center. So long as she has "food, clothing, and a piece of furniture" to give away, she will share them with others more needy than she.

"I've always wanted one of those automatics. I'm getting lazy in my older years," she laughed. "If I feel up to it, I can wash a full day [with my wringer washer]."

Anna Norton, 32-year-old mother of five, Madison County, June 7, 1988

Sign in Jackson, Kentucky, the county seat of Breathitt County, where 55 percent of the children live in poverty.

2 IF YOU'VE GOT YOUR HEALTH

Comments and Recommendations

No discussion of health care among low-income families in Kentucky is complete without reference to the Medicaid card and transportation. The Kentucky Medicaid card can be a vital ingredient to health and recovery from illness — if local doctors and health facilities accept it and if they prescribe medication approved by the Medicaid office. Local health departments help fill in some gaps, through their services are quite limited.

Pineville Community Hospital in Bell County, Kentucky.

Transportation is a problem in cities as well as rural Kentucky. Low-income urban residents rely on public transportation which often is inconvenient and, given their incomes, expensive. Low-income Kentuckians from rural areas tend to have cars, but they are not particularly reliable vehicles. The Medicaid program reimburses recipients for transportation to most medical appointments, if they can find the transportation in the first place and then can advance the cost.

Lack of Transportation May Be a Greater Problem than Availability of Health Care

Grady Stumbo, former head of the Kentucky Cabinet for Human Resources, practices medicine at the Hindman Clinic in Knott County. He does not see availability of health care as the key health issue in the easternmost part of our state. Instead, he thinks lack of transportation is the missing link in the delivery of health care in the eastern counties. In rural Kentucky, there are no buses or other forms of public transportation, other than an occasional taxi business.

In some parts of the state, it is miles and miles to a doctor who will accept a Medicaid card. Further, many low-income families are overwhelmed by the logistics of finding a telephone, calling long distance for an appointment, and later

arranging transportation to arrive at the scheduled hour. The day I visited Jenny Ford, she expressed great relief at having been given a bus pass for the month of June by the coordinator of her housing program. Jenny lives in the Ida Spence Public Housing Project in Covington in one of ten apartments designated as transitional living units for formerly homeless families.

Busfare costs Jenny 65 cents one way plus 10 cents if she travels into another zone. Even with a medical card to cover her children's health care, Jenny usually has no money for busfare at the end of the month. The "end of the month" comes quickly if your children are two and five and your AFDC grant is only $218 a month.

Lack of transportation was one reason Jenny had no prenatal care during a pregnancy that resulted in the birth of twins. She adored the twins, a girl and a boy, but gave them up for adoption when they were a year old, regretfully acknowledging that it was the "right thing to do."

Private Vehicles in Rural Kentucky

Most people who live in the mountains own a car or truck or have access to one. By and large, though, they are not reliable vehicles. I took a brief ride in a truck at least ten years old, which had a dangling ignition starter and had to be turned on with a screwdriver. Travel in and out of the Miles' rutted and rocky driveway had destroyed whatever shock absorbers their truck once had.

When a family is fortunate enough to own a vehicle of any quality, it usually is needed for transportation to a job. Many a family I met in rural Kentucky was totally stranded — miles from a store of any kind, let alone a doctor or hospital — a portion of most days.

> "When I get sick, two-thirds of the time, I have to tough it out because I can't afford health care."
>
> "A lot of times, children have to tough it out, too."
>
> *Exchange between two women at the Appalachian Community for Children's Whispering Pines Community Center, June 6, 1988.*

Although Medicaid pays twelve cents a mile plus $2 to $5 to an individual who drives a patient to a medical appointment, many people I met rely on informal arrangements with neighbors and friends for medical transportation. Ten dollars seemed to be the usual reimbursement. With close friends or relatives, the charge may be little or nothing. Whatever the amount in these informal arrangements, it may not be reported at either end. "If you get a ride from someone at your housing project, they won't turn it in," said an AFDC recipient who attends college. She was referring to the fact that such payment could be considered "income" and therefore affect eligibility for various programs. "It would raise their rent. It would lower mine, but it would raise theirs."

KenPAC

In cities like Covington, where Jenny Ford lives, many physicians accept state medical cards or Medicaid. However, the state has mandated that most welfare recipients participate in Medicaid through a system called "KenPAC." KenPAC stands for Kentucky Patient Access and Care system. Implemented statewide in August 1986, it was designed to reduce skyrocketing costs and to insure access to

A seven-year-old child from Floyd County, Kentucky.

medical care for all recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

In KenPAC areas, which now comprise 109 of Kentucky's 120 counties, Medicaid recipients must select a primary physician from a list of participating providers. "It was a list of strangers to me," said one Floyd County resident I met who had just moved from Pike County to flee an abusive husband. She had to choose a doctor before she was able to learn others' opinions of various doctors. However, she will be able to transfer from one KenPAC physician to another by giving one month's notice of her desire to change.

The primary KenPAC physician, usually a general practitioner, handles all health needs of the family, other than prenatal care and delivery. KenPAC doctors are not required to accept obstetrical patients though many do. Pregnant Medicaid recipients can go to any physician. However, in some parts of the state, few physicians are willing to provide prenatal care to Medicaid patients.

By state regulation, emergency services may be provided without the primary KenPAC physician's preauthorization if the physician cannot be reached. However, authorization must be obtained before the emergency care can be billed to Medicaid. Most KenPAC users that I met hesitate to use emergency services for fear of being held personally liable if the care they seek is not deemed an emergency. As Alice Jones of Rowan County explains it:

> "The way the medical card is set up, if your child gets sick at midnight, you've got to get ahold of the family doctor before you can transfer him [take him] to the hospital. If you can't get ahold of him, no matter how high the temperature is, you just set there 'til you get ahold of him because they won't pay for it. The medical card will not pay for it, unless it's a dying situation."

Lack of Coverage

Another problem with the medical card is inadequate coverage. Although state regulations permit a doctor to request Medicaid

coverage for any drug, many Medicaid recipients I met learned about the procedure only after using their scanty incomes for prescription medicine not on the Medicaid formulary.

Alice Jones, who has had three strokes, told me, "My drugstore bill was over $100 a month until I went to the doctor and said, 'I've either got to stop taking the medicine or it's got to be put on the card.' They called Frankfort and had it put on."

Emma Washington, a Bath County mother who has seizures, did not learn about the procedure to have her medicine approved until she already owed $500.

"The medical card wouldn't pay for it and it was high," she explained. "This is about a three-year bill. They're charging interest for it. Mommy's going to try to pay it off for me. If we don't, they'll try to take me to Small Claims Court."

A 23-year-old Northern Kentucky mother was told by the drugstore she frequented that Medicaid would not pay for birth control pills. She later discovered that the pharmacist's philosophy rather than state regulations were responsible for her inability to obtain contraceptives. Several parents I interviewed complained that

> "You sit up with a child all night because you've not got anything to get their fever down. Have to wash it down to try to get it down to 105 degrees and no way to get to the hospital. A lot of times, you don't have gas or transportation."
>
> *Emma Washington*
> *Bath County*
> *August 3, 1988*

decongestants are not covered. Not only do decongestants make sleep easier for a child with a cold, decongestants also can provide relief to people with allergies.

Not All Doctors Accept Medicaid

Some rural Kentuckians have a harder time than others finding a physician or clinic that will accept their Medical card. The nine women I spoke to at the Appalachian Communities for Children's Project's Whispering Pines Community Center in Jackson County quickly ticked off the doctors in their area who accept Medicaid for prenatal care. Two have offices at Manchester in Clay County, one at London in Laurel County, and one in Richmond, in Madison County. The women knew of none in Jackson County. Too often the solution in these situations is to delay prenatal care until the final months of pregnancy or to forego prenatal care completely.

A woman I met at the Whispering Pines Community Center complained that some doctors who accept Medicaid have the attitude, "We'll get to you when we have time." A Wolfe County mother told me, "Sometimes your children don't get the same medical care and aren't treated the same."

Indeed, one interpretation of a 1988 study suggests some Kentucky Medicaid recipients may be treated differently. The Kentucky Department for Health Services compared prenatal patients at health department clinics who were not Medicaid recipients, those who were Medicaid recipients and Medicaid patients not seen in health departments. Faring best were Medicaid patients served at health departments, where supplementary services by nurses and nutritionists are provided. Faring worst were Medicaid recipients who were not seen in health departments.

Quirks in the Eligibility Rules

As in any major program, the application of rules designed to serve thousands sometimes works a hardship on an individual. In Floyd County, I met a welfare recipient who is beginning her second year at Prestonsburg Community College through the Single Parent/ Homemaker Career Development Program. Her eighteen-year-old son, a junior in high school, is not eligible for a Medicaid card because of his age.

Under state regulations, the young man would qualify for Medicaid coverage despite his age, if he were disabled or if he lived in a separate household from his mother. He also would be eligible if it were possible for him to finish high school before his nineteenth birthday. Despite his exclusion from the program, his mother and two younger siblings are covered by Medicaid. Clearly, the family cannot afford to pay for medical care for the eighteen-year-old son.

Given Kentucky's high dropout rate and the link between education and self- sufficiency, the provision of Medicaid benefits to a child of any age who lives at home and attends school would be a wise investment. Such an investment would seem all the more appropriate when the child's mother is herself in school with a goal of leaving the welfare rolls. If the young man experiences an illness or injury that requires costly treatment, his mother may well have to postpone her efforts to become independent.

Some Medicaid Service Praiseworthy

Perhaps no higher praise of health care provided low-income persons can be given than Donna Ankrom's testimonial about the St. Claire Medical Center in Morehead, Kentucky. Mrs. Ankrom is a 38-year-old mother of three children, all of whom were born at St. Claire.

> "He's cutting his eye teeth. He was cranky all day yesterday. I felt so sorry for him. I'd like to reach up and yank them all out, but I can't do that. When my kids are in pain, I'm in pain. When they're sick, I won't eat. I can't help it. I feel like I ought to be the one sickness took in. I do."
>
> *Gina Stokes*
> *Madison County*
> *June 6, 1988*

Employed at a job that pays $181 every two weeks, she is looking for a place to live that rents for no more than $125 a month so that she and her children can leave her alcoholic husband who abuses the family emotionally.

"The hospital was really good to me," she said. "I have this hangup. Dignity is one of my prime concerns. I cannot feel that I have the right as a human being to treat someone else less than I would want to be treated. I have to say they [the hospital] were super good to me.

"There was a lady in the room with me in the next bed. She had her diamond rings on; she had flowers everywhere; her husband was president of one of the local banks or vice president. She was my roommate. She could not have been any nicer to me. The hospital made no difference between us. If she got juice, I got juice. If I asked for a cup of coffee, I got it.

"You did not know from the treatment at the hospital that I had a medical card. The staff on the maternity floor, I have to say, were some of the best people I've ever seen."

Many Still in Need

Even the high praise ofone facility and the ready availability of health care in some parts ofthe state does not mean all low-income Kentuckians have access to quality health care. "A lot people fall in the cracks," says Christian Appalachian Project staff member Joyce Harvey. Nearly 750,000 stae residents cannot afford basic medical services, according to the United States Census Bureau. Although AFDC recipients automatically receive Medicaid cards, other non-disabled individuals qualify for the card only if they are "medically needy." For a family of three, "medically needy" is defined as having an annual income of no more than $3,500.

A five-year-old girl in Fayette County, Kentucky.

Many people excluded from the Medicaid program have insufficient funds to pay for medial care. Wherever I went last summer and fall, I saw children who seemed small for their age. I also saw evidence that they had suffered from the effects of poverty in a variety of ways. Untreated minor health problems can and do turn into medical crises. The need for something as simple as a bottle of Panadol to ease the pain of a child's earache had one Madison County family stymied.

Health care is a critical concern of families who have a child with a physical or mental disability. In addition to the usual concerns of cost and access, parents of these children worry about the effect of illness on a child who is already limited in some way. Transportation, parking, and reaching a medical office may be more complicated if a child uses a wheelchair. A child who cannot verbalize, due to disability or age, leaves parents wondering if their child's needs are being met.

The Kentucky Physicians Care Program

Kentucky Physicians Care Program was started in January of 1985 to help people whose income is below the federal poverty guideline, but who are not eligible for Medicaid. Anyone in the state who needs, but cannot afford, the services of a physician, can call the program's toll- free number for referral to the nearest office of the Cabinet for Human Resources. That office in turn will refer eligible persons to a doctor.

Initially, 1638 doctors and 68 hospitals agreed to participate in the Kentucky Physicians Care program. More than 2,000 doctors and virtually all hospitals participate now. In a study of the program's effectiveness conducted after nine months of operation, the Urban Studies Center of the University of Louisville learned that 41 percent of the families enrolled in the program did not know they were enrolled. In August of 1988, the president of the program said only about 20 percent of those eligible had sought assistance to date. Thus, this remarkable voluntary effort has not had nearly the impact it might.

Dental Care an Issue, Too

Dental care is a critical issue for many Kentuckians, too. During my research, I saw many people in their twenties and thirties who were missing teeth. Even more distressing was the sight of children as young as three and four with severely discolored or broken teeth that were obviously decayed. Lack of fluoride in well and cistern water is partly responsible, as is a lack of preventive care and inadequate or inappropriate diet. Fluoride mouth rinses are supplied to schools across the state through a health department program, but cannot reverse damage already done.

According to preliminary findings of a study conducted in 1987 by the University of Kentucky, almost six percent of Appalachians have never seen a dentist and 29 percent of Appalachians are missing all their lower teeth.

In Prestonsburg, I was at first confused when a mother told me — with relief in her voice — that her child had had two teeth pulled that morning. The teeth were rotten and had infected the gums. The gums in turn were affecting the child's general health. The cause of the problem was simple. Two cavities had gone unfilled for lack of funds when her child was younger. The medical card had paid for the extractions and the mother was pleased that the child would be starting school this fall with her dental problem resolved.

The medical card does cover a number of dental services, especially for children. Under current regulations, fillings for cavities are reimbursable at a rate of $12. Also covered for $12 is annual dental prophylaxis or teeth- cleaning, including application of stannous flouride. However, the reimbursement rates for dental care have not been raised since 1977 and some 25 percent of the providers withdrew last year, according to Dr. Ken Rich of the Medicaid Technical Advisory Committee.

Teeth should be cleaned twice a year, according to both Dr. Rich and Dr. Theodore Logan, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer of the Kentucky Dental Association. Alice Whitaker, Director of the Lotts Creek Community School in Knott County, would agree. She is concerned about both dental hygiene and the cosmetic appearance of her students' teeth. Appearance is critical to self-esteem and success in

> "What will you do about health insurance if you and your husband decide to divorce?" My question was directed at Judy Holder, a former resident of Sanctuary, Inc., a spouse abuse shelter in Hopkinsville.
>
> "Probably go without. That's what I did [when I worked] before. I couldn't afford it. I didn't make enough to live and have health insurance, too."
>
> *Christian County mother of two daughters, ages 3 and 11, September, 14 1988.*

our society, she believes. Many children at Lotts Creek, the oldest settlement school in Kentucky, would benefit from more extensive dental work than Medicaid covers. No more than two orthodontic procedures are allowed per year, for example. Also, some Lotts Creek students and other low-income families do not qualify for a medical card, but nonetheless, cannot afford dental care.

In the Christian Appalachian Project's Child Development Center in Berea, toothbrushes hang neatly on a bathroom wall. Most children who attend the pre-school have no toothbrush at home. Food stamps cannot be used to pay for toothpaste, toothbrushes, or dental floss. Other items in the family budget necessarily take priority. Knowing about dental hygiene is an important first step to dental health. Being able to buy the necessary supplies is a second necessary step, while seeing a dentist regularly is a third.

Keeping Children from "Toughing It Out"

One of the most difficult aspects of raising a family on a low-income is caring for an ill child. Poor children probably become sick more often than others because of drafty houses, clothes that are not warm enough, inadequate diet, and lack of preventive health care.

> "I'm not risking my children's health. If I have to cut something out, they're going to get proper care. If my kids are sick, I'll see about rounding the money up from somebody or charge it. I haven't even got hospitalization."
>
> *Becky Sue Brown*
> *McCracken County*
> *September 14, 1988*

Almost every time poor parents told me of a child's pain during an illness, they also said that they wished they could have changed places with their child. Too often, as a woman at the Whispering Pines Community Center in Jackson County explained, "Children have to tough it out, too."

To insure basic and preventive health care to the children of Kentucky, we offer the following recommendations for improving the Medicaid program:

- Kentucky should encourage more physicians, particularly in rura areas, to accept Medicaid cards for prenatal care by the use of both incentives and disincentives. The lack of ready access to prenatal care is the beginning of a chain of events that sometimes ends with low-weight, high-risk babies who may require intensive hospital care.

- Kentucky should publicize the availability of transportation subsidies under the Medicaid program for visits to medical appointments. Low-income parents who are unaware of these subsidies sometimes delay needed medical care for themselves or their children. Untreated minor conditions may turn into more complicated conditions which require more extensive and expensive care.

- Kentucky should expand publicity and referrals to the Kentucky Physicians Care Program. The voluntary private-sector program is designed to serve poor families whose income is too high for eligiblity in the Medicaid program. Without knowledge of the program, low-income families may not seek needed health care. Early treatment for injuries and illnesses is both humane and cost effective.

- Kentucky should provide Medicaid coverage to all children in a family where other children qualify, if the excluded child is enrolled in public school. The current rule precluding certain older children from coverage should be modified so that even children over eighteen years of age are eligible if they are attempting to complete their education. Their diploma could be first step toward economic independence.

- Kentucky should periodically inform Medicaid recipients of the ability of physicians to request reimbursement for drugs not on the Medicaid drug formulary. Medicaid recipients who cannot afford prescribed drugs sometimes go into debt buying the drugs or stop taking the medication.

- Kentucky should update the Medicaid reimbursement schedules for both dentists and physicians to account for inflation. Low reimbursement rates discourage participation in the program and thus decrease the availability of health care to low-income families.

- Kentucky should pay for semiannual teeth-cleaning through the Medicaid program because preventive dental care is less costly than corrective treatment.

Lee Bradley's Story

"I just woke up and I was in labor and they couldn't stop it and they flew me up there," Lee Bradley said, describing the hours before her son's birth at Norton's Hospital in Louisville. He was born two-and-one-half months prematurely.

"He weighed two pounds and twelve ounces," she said in a tone that showed she was still amazed that he had survived. Lee and her husband, who are from McCracken County, lived at the Ronald McDonald House for two months as they watched Timothy struggle for his life.

Timothy Bradley, age two, outside the Family Service Society office in Paducah, Kentucky.

"Not only did they help us financially at Louisville, they helped us emotionally," Lee said, referring to both the hospital staff at Kosair Children's Hospital and the Ronald McDonald House staff and volunteers.

Timothy is still slight. However, when I talked with his mother in Paducah in September, he exhibited the interests and high energy of most toddlers. The physicians involved in Lee's and Timothy's care never determined why the little boy was born prematurely. Lee is only 22 and in good health, so it was a surprise when her second child, a daughter, also had early medical problems. Emily, now fifteen months, has hydrocephalus, a condition characterized by an abnormal increase in the amount of fluid in the cranium.

"It was found at three weeks and she was shunted," Lee told me, referring to a medical procedure by which the excess fluid is drained. I did not meet Emily, but Lee showed me her picture. The girl's appearance is normal, but she continues to need specialized medical care.

Lee is now divorced and has been awarded child support. However, her husband does not make his child support payments. Lee works, but told me, "I can only work part-time because I can't lose the medical card."

"I'm trying to get SSI [Social Security Income benefits for disabled persons], not the check, just the medical card, so she [Emily] would always have it," Lee said.

Lee has used the Medicaid card to pay for some of Timothy's dental care, too. "I had to get [his teeth] capped. His teeth was rotten at an early age. He brushes them. I help them and everything. So I took him to the dentist and they capped the bottom one and they

> "I went into a pharmacy to get medicine and they said, 'Hello, mam, can I help you?' I handed them my prescription. So she brings me the medicine and [I] give the medical card. She became a whole other person. It was like a piece of dirt had walked through the door."
>
> *Betty Marshall*
> *Floyd County*
> *August 17, 1988*

capped the top one. That one has fell off and I had it replaced and then it fell off again and I have to take him back to get it replaced."

If Emily is awarded SSI benefits, Lee believes she could handle Timothy's and her medical expenses. She would like to work more hours in her job as a telephone solicitor for a carpet cleaning company.

"It's aggravating sometimes. When I get a lot of bookings, I feel good," she told me. "When I get a lot of people hanging up on me or saying, 'You have called me two times,' then I get discouraged.

"I've had somewhat of a problem with sitters," Lee told me, as we discussed her job. "Right now my mom's keeping Emily. But she's older and she's really too nervous.

"I found out about this program for working mothers. You go down and sign up and they [the state] will pay your daycare. My mom cannot be paid, but they will pay a daycare. If you find a good daycare, you know, they might learn a little bit," Lee said. Under state regulations, payment for childcare can only be made to a provider who is not a household member.

Lee plans to find out more about the state's daycare program. She is grateful for the assistance she already receives. "If it wasn't for the government, there would be no way I could do it," she told me with humility.

"We have HUD [Housing and Urban Development] housing. You pick where you live. I live in a mobile home behind my mom and HUD pays part of the rent. It's not like these courts, it's out in the country. [The children] can play."

Lee is holding her family together with a part-time low-wage job, a medical card, government-subsidized housing, food stamps, her family's help and her own personal determination. It is a complicated formula that could easily fall apart, in spite of Lee's best efforts.

"What problems are you having?" I asked her at one point in the conversation.

"Just mainly financial," she answered. "Just mainly financial."

The Lowell's Story

"My little sister has cancer," seven-year old Kathy Lowell told me as she pointed to a younger, darker- complected version of herself. Not sure how to respond, I simply nodded in what I hoped she would interpret as friendly concern. I then walked into the Lowell's rented home in rural Floyd County where Kathy's mother, Anne Lowell, age 25, motioned for me to sit down.

Kathy and her three-year old sister Crystal sat down on a sofa in the small but neat living room. During my visit the girls never left

one another's side. I admired their clean, shiny hair, which softly framed their round cherubic faces. Anne told me that Crystal was one of the only children her doctor had treated who had not lost her hair during chemotherapy.

The family's nightmare began July 30, 1987, when Kathy Lowell and her husband, Don, learned that Crystal's blood count was abnormal. Crystal was being examined during a routine examination provided by the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program. Within days they had the diagnosis: leukemia. Crystal was two years old at the time. She soon spent 21 days in a Lexington hospital receiving chemotherapy. Her mother and father stayed with her the entire time. Kathy, who lived with relatives during the week, came up to Lexington on weekends.

Illness was no stranger to the Lowells. In January of 1985, Don Lowell, now 30, was hospitalized six weeks with a lung infection. A few months later, Kathy was in the hospital with bronchitis. In June, Crystal was born and had to remain in the hospital extra days because of jaundice.

Kathy also has asthma and had just spent two nights in the hospital shortly before my visit in July. Her medicine for one week cost $37. Since November of 1987, Don Lowell has been employed as a maintenance worker through the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). He had held his previous job at a funeral home eleven years. Don Lowell felt pressured to resigned from that job when his wages were garnisheed almost $300 per month because of the family's hospital bills.

Medical care of the type Crystal needs is two-and-one-half hours away at the University of Kentucky Medical Center. The

Crystal Lowell, age three, who has leukemia, with her seven-year-old sister, Kathy. Kathy wants to be a "heart doctor" when she grows up.

family has no car though a brother-in-law loans his to them when he can. The Lowells would very much like to have their own car.

"We can make payments," Anne explains, "but we can't get the down payment together." On occasion the Lowells have rented a car, a seeming extravagance but the only guarantee of transportation to work for Don.

A key to the family's financial survival is Crystal's $354 monthly Social Security Income (SSI) check and her Medicaid card. Medical care and drugs for the three-year old cost $150 a week. When physicians pronounce Crystal's leukemia is in remission, the SSI checks will cease.

"My husband and I plan for me to continue my education when the children are both in school," Anne explained. She had recently failed the GED examination by just one point but plans to try again.

Kathy, who is an A+ student, has plans for the future, too. She wants to be a heart doctor. "That way I can help people and make money, too," she explained.

Angela Samuels' Story

At six months of age, Jeannette weighed seven pounds — only six ounces more than she had weighed at birth. Social workers were ready to remove Jeannette from her young mother's care on grounds of neglect. Fortunately, a physician discovered the reason behind Jeannette's low weight before that drastic step was taken.

Angela Samuels was only fifteen years old when her first child, Lola, was born. Then when Lola was sixteen months old, Angela became pregnant again, but had a miscarriage. As is common in such cases, her doctor performed a minor surgical procedure called dilation and curettage or D & C following her miscarriage.

By her calculations, Angela was pregnant with Jeannette one week after her surgery, though she was unaware of it at the time. Two months later, a cyst "burst inside me," she told me. Again, the treatment was surgery, this time under general anesthesia. "Jeannette went to the bottom of my stomach and couldn't get any food [as a result of the surgery]," she explained.

Nevertheless, Jeannette had a perfectly normal birthweight. However, she did not act like Lola had as an infant. Her primary problem was vomiting. She threw up constantly. Though she was young, Angela had experience as a mother and was very concerned. She sought medical advice from a pediatrician in Northern Kentucky where she lived.

The physician diagnosed Jeannette's condition as failure-to-thrive syndrome and changed the baby's formula. The problem continued and he changed the formula again. Still there was no relief and he changed the formula again . . . and again and again. "All Dr. Rogers did was prescribe different formulas, every kind of milk you can name," Angela told me.

Apparently, Dr. Rogers contacted a social worker, who in turn began an investigation of Angela on grounds of possible neglect. As might be expected, Angela became depressed and felt quite helpless. Then, somehow, Angela got the idea of taking her baby to another physician.

The second physician discovered a hole in Jeannette's stomach and said that a reflex was causing the baby to vomit and lose her milk. He put her on table food at six months of age. Jeannette immediately began to gain weight. She was 17 months of age when I saw her last summer and weighed a healthy 25 pounds.

Angela had plans to begin her GED at the end of the summer at the same time her older daughter, Lola, would begin preschool. Angela is optimistic that she can earn the diploma within six weeks. She would like to work at some point, though she told me that "When you get a job, it doesn't pay enough for you to make it." She and the father of her children continue to have a close relationship. They think they will have enough money saved to move into an apartment together soon.

> "You just don't take 'em to the doctor."
>
> *Floyd County mother, July 14, 1988.*

Although she is only eighteen years old, Angela seems to be managing her life fairly well under adverse circumstances. She cares deeply about her two daughters and wants only the best for them. But

The 55-bed Middle Kentucky River Medical Center, which opened July 7, 1988, serves Breathitt, Lee, Owsley, and Wolfe Counties.

in providing for them, she has missed her own childhood. When I asked her if she had any advice for other teens who became pregnant, she replied simply, "Stay in school."

Kathleen Thompson's Story

"When they said she was autistic, I thought it meant she could draw," Kathleen Thompson told me without embarrassment. She was talking about her daughter, Jessie, who celebrated her fifth birthday in September. In addition to her autistic condition, Jessie also experiences seizures. Last summer I met both Kathleen and Jessie, a slender child with two shiny blond ponytails.

Almost as soon as the three of us walked into a small office of the Brighton Center in Northern Kentucky, Jessie lay down on the cool concrete floor. The Center offers programs for young children, youth, and adults at four locations in Newport and Covington. The East End office of the Brighton Center, where I met Kathleen and her daughter, is housed in a former school. A noisy fan whirled overhead as I arranged metal folding chairs for our conversation. Then, as Kathleen and I started to talk, Jessie put one hand in her mouth, began rocking rhythmically, and retreated into a world of her own.

> "No insurance company will write up a [health insurance] policy on a man who works in an underground mine."
>
> *Floyd County mother of four, who attended the weekly women's meeting convened at the Christian Appalachian Project's Youth Center in Martin, Kentucky, July 14, 1988.*

Kathleen's and Jessie's stories begin five years ago when Kathleen was told she had cancer. She was promptly given radiation treatment. One morning, Kathleen "felt bad" and went to the emergency room. A diagnostic test called an ultrasound revealed she was eight months pregnant.

The mother of five children aged 15 to 22, Kathleen was shocked and worried to learn of her pregnancy. In addition to the radiation treatments she had received, she had taken medication for bleeding ulcers during her pregnancy. Not once during the preceding eight months had she felt fetal movement nor had she missed a single menstrual period. As Kathleen talked about that frightening time, Jessie occasionally moved her hands, sometimes holding them together, sometimes putting them into her face or her hair. Her mother smiled at her often, leaning over to stroke her lovingly at times.

Jessie was diagnosed as autistic as an infant. "She recently has been diagnosed as mentally retarded, too," her mother told me, whispering the words "mentally retarded" through cupped hands so that Jessie could not possibly hear her.

"They say one side of the brain is involved," the girl's mother went on, "but I don't believe it." Apparently, Kathleen has proven the doctors wrong before. "They said she'd never walk," she told me, "but I got to working with her."

Kathleen would like to do more for her child. "I'd like to get her into some kind of program or I'd like someone to teach me how to work with her. I don't know what to do with her. I want all the help I can for her," she said. There is no school for autistic children in Northern Kentucky though there are support groups for parents of children with disabilities. Kathleen, however, does not drive and does not leave Jessie with a sitter.

Although her desire to do more for her daughter is genuine, Kathleen has not had much success finding appropriate services for her daughter or herself. She has been trying to reach one organization "for three years. They never called back," she told me in frustration.

Kathleen was pleased when Jessie was accepted into a local Headstart program about a year ago. Unfortunately, the young girl was expelled for recurring bouts of head lice. Her mother told me she now uses lice shampoo regularly as a preventive measure.

The little girl does not mind having her hair shampooed and, in fact, loves to take baths. She once took seven in one day! "She washes herself, squeaky clean, too," her mother told me proudly, "and she always wants a clean dress." Because Jessie is not completely toilet trained, she was wearing her third outfit of the day when I met her.

"At school they forced her to wear diapers," Kathleen told me, "and they [the diapers] cut into her." Kathleen keeps her in underpants, knowing Jessie will be more comfortable.

Jessie began making a low cooing sound as we continued talking. Not an unpleasant sound, it is one her mother says she makes often. Later Jessie stopping cooing, moved into a corner and began staring blankly. Without any warning, she startled both Kathleen and me by leaving the corner and coming to the chair where I was sitting. With a quick bird-like motion, she bent her knees and lay her head in my lap. Although I smiled and spoke to her, she did not respond. Within a few minutes, she was back on the floor.

Jessie's erratic behavior is not as difficult for Kathleen to deal with as are Jessie's crying spells. "She cries almost every night sometime between 4 and 6 o'clock. She won't let me touch her. She

Earl Lee Miles, age eight, in his Madison County home.

sobs for hours sometimes. Then after that, she'll start laughing," Kathleen said. "Last night she began crying at 12:30 a.m. She fell asleep crying last night at 2:30 a.m."

Her daughter responds to almost nothing when she is crying and Kathleen has learned to let her be. Still, she finds it frustrating and

disconcerting to think that her daughter may want something she cannot ask for or that she is lonely or afraid.

Kathleen does her best to provide Jessie with whatever she seems to want or need. The girl "doesn't ask for food or drink but accepts if it's offered. She has a good appetite and takes her medicine [for seizures]. She likes to look in the mirror. She knows she's pretty. She never reaches for you. She'll lay there and look up at you," Kathleen said.

Besides her most basic needs, "Jessie needs a lot of special things I can't afford," Kathleen admitted with regret. Last summer, Kathleen wanted to buy her daughter a musical toy that costs $49. A tape in the toy plays songs about the alphabet. She thought her daughter would like the music and might begin to learn the alphabet if she had the toy.

Kathleen once put a $27 toy on layaway, but the $49 price tag for the musical toy seemed to Kathleen like something about which she could only dream. Her only income is Jessie's monthly $340 disability check. Her eighteen-year-old son, who is employed and lives with her, contributes some to the household expenses. Another son, a fifteen-year-old, who lives at home is in school.

In one way, the future does not look bright for Kathleen and Jessie. As Jessie grows up, caring for her probably will become more difficult. Getting an accurate diagnosis of her condition will continue to be difficult so long as Jessie is nonverbal. Kathleen's poverty, her inability to drive, her own health status, also conspire against a happy resolution. In another way, however, Kathleen and Jessie are fortunate. They have each other. Kathleen cherishes her daughter and is, at the same time, the center of her daughter's world.

Bul Vincent's Story

"He can't do nothing for himself," Bul Vincent told us as he discussed his 19-year-old nephew, Joe. Bul Vincent requested that we use his real name, explaining "If I was leery of you using my name, I'd be leery of talking to you. And if it can help someone else, I want you to use my real name."

Bul Vincent's nephew, Joe, has had cerebral palsy since birth. For the past ten years, Joe and his two younger brothers have lived with their uncle in a modest home on the south side of Jefferson County. A wheelchair ramp stretches across the front of the house and a "No Smoking" sign is tacked to the front door.

The boys' father is dead and their mother is incapable of caring for her sons, due to mental illness. "You do what you have to do," Vincent responded when I asked why he took in the three boys.

Joe was close to Bul's first wife, according to Barry Slaiman of the Council for Retarded Citizens. The Vincents are not served directly by the Council but Barry Slaiman maintains a friendship with the family on his own time. When Bul's first wife, Dottie, died of lung cancer last year, her loss apparently hurt and angered Joe. After she died, Joe spit and kicked and once thrust himself in his bed so hard that his head became stuck between the bars on the side.

"Is it hard?" I asked Bul Vincent, referring to the efforts that are required to care for Joe.

"No, it's not hard," he replied, without hesitation. Barry Slaiman had cautioned me that Mr. Vincent would downplay the difficulties, perhaps from pride, perhaps from an acceptance of his life as part of "God's plan."

The first time I visited, the living room contained only a couch, a coffee table which Mr. Vincent had built, a television, and Joe's electric wheelchair. The family prefers Joe's other chair, the one they push. Mr. Vicent complained that Joe cannot navigate the electric one too well. However, he does fine with it at school where the halls are wide, according to Barry Slaiman.

Joe, age nineteen, lives in Bullitt County with two brothers, his aunt, and uncle, in a home which has no running water.
(Photo by Don Cull)

The Vincents are a proud family; they want to do as much for themselves as they can. They planned to move to Bullitt County a few days after my first visit. They used their tow truck and van to move most of their possessions. "I drive one and he drives the other," explained Dora Vincent, Bul's second wife.

"To tell the truth," Bul Vincent explained, "it's a little too much here," referring to his mortgage and utility bills in Jefferson County. At 60, Bul still works part-time in the heating and air conditioning business. He also tows junk cars and fixes things. His formal education ended in the second grade, and he is unable to read or write.

"He can do about anything though," claims Barry Slaiman of the Council for Retarded Citizens. Bul Vincent personally installed a hydraulic lift, a highly complicated technical task, in the family van, enabling Joe to travel more easily.

While the family is leaving one home and settling in another, Joe is staying with Bul's son.

"What are your hopes for Joe?" I asked.

"I don't know," Mr. Vincent replied bluntly, but kindly. "I try to take each day as it comes."

Under federal law, children with disabilities may attend public school until they attain the age of 21. Joe, who is moderately retarded, has been a student at the Cerebral Palsy School in Louisville. His family expected him to be in a classroom for disabled students after the move to Bullitt County. However, when I visited the family in

> "I'm having a problem with my daughter. I can't find out what's wrong with her. They did a urinalysis, blood test, and they examined her. Then they sent her to the hospital for a CT scan and her stomach. Now they want to send her to a surgeon.
>
> "My daughter is having bad pains inside, she just generally feels bad. Around her eyes, it's real dark. She's eleven and she's growing up. I don't want her to be operated on before I check out every resource.
>
> "I want to have her checked by a gynecologist first. She's eleven. But if he [her primary physician under the state KENPAC program] doesn't think she needs to be checked by one, then I'm out of luck. Without his permission, we can't use the card [Medicaid card].
>
> *A 44-year-old mother I met at the Big Sandy Gap Family Abuse Center in Floyd County, Kentucky, August 15, 1988.*

their new home at the end of September, I learned that school officials had told the Vincents that students like Joe could attend school only through age sixteen. Fortunately, Barry Slaiman intervened and Joe is now enrolled and doing well.

Joe's expressive speech is quite limited though he understands a great deal, according to Barry Slaiman. He smiled spontaneously as we entered the Vincents' new home in Bullitt County. He did not speak but seemed very pleased to see Mr. Slaiman. He cooperated with our volunteer photographer, Don Cull, and seemed to enjoy the attention. He smiled in agreement when Dora Vincent told us how much Joe enjoys a milkshake in the evening.

Caring for Joe is more involved in Bullitt County than it was in Jefferson County. The Vincents' new home has no running water or indoor plumbing. They haul water and bathe at a small church in Shepherdsville ("nothing fancy") where Bul Vincent preaches. It is more than ten miles from their house.

The family has tried, unsuccessfully so far, to receive compensation from the real estate agent who found their new home but failed to tell them of the lack of plumbing. They also are considering putting it back on the market. The Vincents and their three teenage boys would not knowingly have moved into a house without plumbing. A septic tank will cost $4,000 and the Vincents question whether it is worth installing.

Joe cannot walk, bathe or feed himself, and he wears disposable diapers. With indoor plumbing, the diapers might not be necessary according to Barry Slaiman. Joe has a medical card which covers his health care and items such as his disposable diapers. His disability check meets most of Joe's other expenses.

Presumably, Joe's two brothers, now sixteen and eighteen, will leave home within a few years. When the boys move out, the lifting and carrying of Joe, who weighs 90 to 100 pounds, will fall totally on Bul and Dora Vincent.

"When I'm 18, I want to quit school," Joe's younger brother told his uncle recently. "'Not unless you've finished high school' is what I told him," said Bul Vincent. "Not unless you've finished high school!" Though he does not think his own lack of education has hurt him, Bul Vincent wants his nephews to finish school.

Bul Vincent had "no complaints" when I first saw him in July in Jefferson County. "Complaints don't accomplish anything," he explained. Two months later in Bullitt County, he was not so optimistic.

"No one wants to cooperate with us," he said. Discouraged by a lack of courtesy at the local drug store, the family now buys Joe's medicine in Louisville. Their faith goes a long way toward sustaining the family, Bul Vincent says, but both he and his wife are very discouraged about their new home.

And They Found That There Were Two of Them

"Prenatal care is really important," I said to Jenny Ford after she told me she was going to a health clinic in Covington.

"I found that out the last time," she said, quietly. "I didn't get to go see the doctor at all the last time I was pregnant and when I went into the hospital to have the baby, I found out I was having twins and I didn't know it."

"Oh, is Hannah a twin?" I asked, referring to her two-year-old daughter.

"They're [the twins] not here," she answered. "They're in foster care. I went in to have the baby," she said, continuing the earlier story, "and the doctor took an ultrasound [a diagnostic x-ray-like procedure] since I hadn't seen the doctor at all. The house doctor took an ultrasound and found that there was two of them."

"I bet that was a surprise," I said.

"I seen that I was going to have twins, a girl and a boy, one was breech, he was laying sideways," she went on.

"Are the twins all right?" I asked.

"They're fine now, big, fat, and plump," she said with a smile. Then more soberly, she continued. "I wasn't able to take care of them like I should. Being as how they're twins, they wanted to be fed at the same time. I had her [pointing to Hannah to take care of and Tommy [her son, now five]. It was hard. I was living by myself. I had to prop one bottle and feed the other in my arms."

"There was one time in particular when my children was little babies. I borrowed money to take one of them to the doctor. I took him to the doctor and he wrote me out enough prescriptions so that it was $52 to buy the medication. I didn't have the money to buy the medication so I had to wait til I got it.

"During that time my child lay on the couch, and him just a little infant, and screamed with the earache because I didn't know anywhere else to borrow the money to get his medicine. So really I just wasted my time borrowing the money to go to the doctor."

Patty Taggart, at the Appalachian Communities for Children's Whispering Pines Community Center in Jackson County, June 6, 1988.

"Was Hannah still taking a bottle?" I asked. She nodded and continued. "They [the twins] got this thing that the doctors diagnosed as failure to thrive and they had to put them in the hospital. So my social worker asked me if I wanted to put them in foster care temporarily and I said I thought I should. The day they left the hospital, I called my social worker. She told me about it [the twins' discharge]. I was stunned. I didn't realize what was going on at first. I was in my own world. I just didn't believe it."

"Do you get to see them at all?" I asked Jenny gently.

She sighed and said, "I get to see them tomorrow."

"How old are they?" I wanted to know.

"They are one."

"Do you hope that you can get them back sometime?"

"I can't," she replied and choked back a sob. "Tomorrow is my goodbye visit. It's not easy but I feel it's the best." Jenny and I both cried for a minute and then hugged.

Searching for some comforting, reaffirming comment, I told her I thought they would be fine.

"I hope so," she said, still crying. "I just hope something doesn't happen to them. You hear about people adopting kids out and then abusing them and stuff like that."

Jenny's emotional involvement with her twins will not end when a judge signs the order terminating her parental rights to her twins. Her tears were clear evidence of her love for her babies and her

frustration at being unable to care for them. Her recognition of her shortcomings and her voluntary action to insure a better life for the twins, however, seemed to me proof of the most generous kind of love.

An Introduction to Lynn Presser

"We don't really consider her handicapped. She's within normal height and weight. She's one-and-a-half and she can take a few steps by herself. If she's going after a ball, she'll take five or six steps." Diane Presser was describing her youngest child, Lynn, who has Downs syndrome.

Lynn is the center of attention at the Presser household. She has three older sisters, aged four, eight, and eleven and an older brother, aged fourteen. Lynn's brothers and sisters thoroughly enjoy just watching Lynn. Lynn is engaging as she tries to catch a ball rolled across the floor to her or to clap her hands.

"We were surprised," Lynn's mother said. "They told us she would be like a vegetable. We thought she'd be nothing."

Whether or not Lynn is disabled has several implications for the little girl and her family, too. Some disabled persons are eligible for a monthly grant under the federal Social Security Income (SSI) program. SSI recipients also qualify for a state Medicaid card, which will cover many of their medical expenses.

At this time, however, "she's not considered handicapped. We cannot get SSI and we have no Medicaid," Mrs. Presser told me.

Lynn's parents want to treat her as a normal child, believing that such treatment will allow her to achieve her fullest potential. On the

Alice Jones has had three strokes and seventeen operations in her 44 years. She has asthma, her blood pressure is high, and once she was paralyzed. She sees a doctor at least weekly. "Lots and lots of time the medical card does not pay for the medicine that you need," she told me. Only after running up a high bill at her pharmacy did she learn that a physician can request approval for Medicaid payment of non-covered drugs.

Alice's daughter, Jennifer, has severe allergies. Alice cannot hang Jennifer's clothing outside to dry because the pollen would make her ill. "I can put her into the hospital if I hang them outside. Her fever goes to 104 with these allergies and I've got to scrub and clean and do certain things to her bed."

The air conditioner, a gift from a local church, helps both Alice and Jennifer stay healthy, and it "never kicks off." Alice told me she's "hoping it's not over $80 [for electricity this month]. That's all I got held back."

Transportation has been an ongoing problem for the Scotts, although Medicaid reimburses most transportation expenses incurred for medical care. Janet Scott's son, Jeffery, was severely injured when a fried accidentally shot him with a pump BB gun. "They gave me a check for $14 if I went to Madisonville [55 miles from her home in Todd County] and $47 if I went to Lexington [202 miles]. You'd have to have somebody take you and a lot of people don't want to take you, even for that," she said.

Janet Scott's father owns an automobile but Janet was told that transportation fees were not available to family. "This is one of the things that really hurt, because my father had a car and we sometimes had to use it to come back and forth over here [to Madisonville]. As long as it's somebody in your family, they don't want to pay them and you can't get somebody for $14. The first thing they'll say is '$20' and they don't want you to pay them $14," Janet said. "If I only came for braces [and not a medical visit], they wouldn't pay."

By the age of eighteen months, Lynn Presser already had had pneumonia several times, chicken pox, and a virus that necessitated six days of hospitalization. (Photo by Don Cull)

other hand, the extra income from SSI, and particularly the medical card, would be helpful.

"Our insurance pays 80 percent," Lynn's mother said, "but it takes six or eight months to pay a bill. We get dunned, it goes to the

credit bureau." Health insurance is a fringe benefit from Warren Presser's job with a paper company in Jefferson County.

Unlike many children with Downs syndrome, Lynn has no heart problems. However, she does have asthma and has had other health problems in the past.

"She had pneumonia almost once a month her first winter," her mother told me. "We were in a house that was damp and the roof leaked and it was a really bad environment. Once we moved, it improved quite a bit. We thought they'd condemn it, but they rented it out again after we left," she added.

"She had the chicken pox last summer at six months of age. Three or four weeks after the chicken pox, a virus settled in her liver and she spent six days in the hospital. It really scared us," Mrs. Presser went on.

Although Lynn's health is relatively good now, her teeth are considered unusual. She did not have her first tooth until she was thirteen months old. At eighteen months, she has four back teeth and one on the side. The potential for a nutritional problem due to her teeth triggered Lynn's eligibility for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Although the Pressers treat their daughter like any other eighteen-month-old, they do not deny that she has Downs syndrome. Mrs. Presser understands that her daughter surely will be more delayed than other children in reaching various developmental milestones in the future. Nonetheless, right now, it is clear, as Mrs. Presser told me several times, "I'm really proud of her."

3 A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS

Comments and Recommendations

"I stood in her living room and watched the snow," said attorney Sue Prater. Ms. Prater works for the Appalachian Regional Defense Fund of Kentucky, in Jackson, the county seat of Breathitt County. The snow was visible, not through a window in her client's dilapidated trailer, but through holes in the walls. The aging trailer, which was home to a mother and five children, had no running water and was heated by a wood burning stove.

Housing Is an Issue in Eastern Kentucky

Sue Prater thinks housing is the most pressing issue for low-income families in her area of Eastern Kentucky. Homelessness is not a phenomenon restricted to urban Kentucky. Decent, affordable housing is in short supply in the mountains just as it is in the cities. Many rural Kentuckians living in substandard housing are grateful to have a roof over their heads. They would not dare to complain about the condition of their home for fear of eviction. Housing codes do not exist in rural Kentucky and conscience provides the only incentive for rural landlords to maintain their rental property.

When a homeless client finds a trailer or a house for rent, but in ill repair, Sue Prater feels torn. If the client rents the home, the family can stay together, which is their goal and generally what is best for them. However, if conditions of the rental property are too inferior, and often they are, Sue knows that, before long, an investigation of the home may lead to removal of the children on grounds of neglect.

Problems in Northeast Kentucky Are Similar

Northeast Kentucky is no different than the Breathitt County area. Sister Kathleen Mulchrone works in Northeast Kentucky with the Christian Social Service Center which is located in Owingsville in Bath County. Last August, she told me that "shack" is an appropriate word to describe the homes of some low-income families her organization serves.

"A farmer may rent out a shack," she explained. "Usually he doesn't even charge rent. He gives them the shack for nothing which means he's got power over that family. He's doing them a favor. Some of the places are not fit to live in."

Sister Kathleen then described a home she had visited which had only two electrical outlets. The frail grandmother who lived there was dying of cancer and used an oxygen machine to help her breathe. To warm their dinner on the hot plate, however, the family had to temporarily unplug the grandmother's machine.

Primitive Cooking Arrangements Are Common

Although I did not learn of other families who had to make the same choice between medical and cooking equipment, I did meet many families who prepare their meals on hot plates, wood stoves, or Coleman stoves. Some own gas stoves but have had their gas service disconnected due to non-payment of bills. In Louisville the local gas and electric company discontinues service to some 100 dwellings per day for non-payment.

Jessica Wheeler, age ten, with her favorite doll, outside the Bluegrass-Aspendale Apartments in Fayette County, Kentucky.

Owner-Occupied Substandard Homes

Ironically, some of the most substandard housing in rural Kentucky is not rental property at all. Some rural Kentuckians own a home and a few acres of land which have been in their family for generations. Others manage to buy a small plot of land, perhaps with the proceeds from a worker's compensation or disability case. Their land, too, may have a dwelling on it.

These old country houses typically are small, drafty, and deteriorating. Most of them have electricity. Often, a well supplies the family with water. Some 38 percent of rural households in Kentucky rely on individual wells while another 16 percent haul their water or get it from cisterns or springs.

For those who want to build or buy a home, the Kentucky Housing Corporation currently offers housing loans at an 8.3 percent interest rate to state residents. Generally, the applicant's income must be under $26,400. State legislation which created the corporation recognizes the "serious shortage of decent, safe and sanitary residential housing available at prices or rentals which can be afforded by persons and families of lower and moderate income." Several other organizations in the state also assist low-income persons who wish to purchase a home.

Trailers, A Trademark of Eastern Kentucky

Trailers and Eastern Kentucky are almost synonymous. Not only are they used for private residences, but also to house churches, restaurants, truck-part supply houses, and even tanning salons. Trailers dot the narrow roads that wind through so much of rural Eastern Kentucky. Both new and used trailers are sold in the larger towns. Near Barbourville in Knox County, for example, I saw scores of trailers for sale at a lot marked by a sign reading "Oakwood Homes, 1987 Models, $3000 off."

Once purchased, a trailer must be transported. Often the destination is reached by traveling shoulderless, curving two-lane roads that climb up and down a steep mountain. A truck usually pulls the trailer in an entourage that starts and ends with pickup trucks or cars bearing signs that read, in understatement, "Wide Load." When a particularly tricky curve is encountered, several people with red flags will hop out, positioning themselves ahead of and behind the slow-moving truck to caution oncoming motorists.

Despite the difficulty involved in transporting a trailer, such a home is far less expensive than building one of equivalent size. Transporting supplies to the mountains is expensive and arduous. Building on the narrow strips of land squeezed between the mountains is not simple. Bulldozers and other equipment cannot be brought in readily and may not have enough room to function properly when they arrive. In contrast, trailers are delivered essentially in one piece, often complete with carpet and drapes. An advantage of a trailer is that it can be enlarged. As a family's needs change, a porch, or an extra bedroom can be added.

Public Housing

Public housing does exist in rural Kentucky. Some units are in public housing projects. Others are subsidized apartments owned privately. In rural Kentucky, as in the cities, waiting lists are long. Some rural Kentuckians feel caged in an apartment, public or private, and would rather live anywhere else. They value their privacy and independence, and cannot imagine living without a garden.

Part of the 366-apartment Ida Spence Public Housing Project in Covington, Kentucky.

Alice Jones of Rowan County was one of several people around the state who believes "It's who you know" that determines whether you get into public housing. "I was on the waiting list for one year and never did hear from them," she said. In urban areas, people reported even longer waits to me.

Homelessness, a Growing Problem

Some people in both rural and urban Kentucky have no place to live and cannot await a vacancy in a public housing project. In October of 1987, the Kentucky Coalition for the Homeless was established to work with and advocate on behalf of homeless Kentuckians. A study commissioned by the Kentucky General Assembly in 1986 identified 29,000 homeless state residents.

The reasons for their homelessness vary. Non-payment of rent at a former home might have been caused by loss of a job or a decision to buy food or medicine instead of paying rent. "For some people, it's a toss up every month, whether to pay the rent or the gas and electric bill," said Linda Davis, Executive Director of the Louisville Tenants Union (LTU). Other causes of eviction, particularly from a public housing project, include allowing family or friends to "double up" or

violating another rule. The breakup of a couple may land one or both of them on the street. Some individuals leave home to escape an abusive spouse or parent, though they may not have the resources to live independently. Rental property may become uninhabitable after a fire or when water or heat is cut off.

A two-year-old resident of Welcome House, a shelter for homeless women and children in Covington, Kentucky.

Regardless of the causes, more and more families are counted among the homeless. At least 100,000 children in this country are homeless on any given night, according to the National Academy of Sciences. Their research was conducted over a ten-month period at agencies serving the homeless in four rural areas and in eleven cities, including Lexington, Kentucky.

Shelters such as Welcome House in Covington and St. Vincent de Paul Apartments in Louisville are important but too small in size and too few in number. Some shelters are segregated by sex, thus forcing families to split up temporarily.

The Low-Income Tenant

Low-income tenants have their own set of problems, too. Many such tenants are single women who head households. They may be recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or minimum-wage employees. The homes they can afford to rent often are poorly maintained. Their pleas for repairs may go unanswered for days and weeks at times. Their utility bills are high because their homes lack insulation and caulking. Vermin are commonplace. Indeed, housing available to low-income tenants may be dangerous with loose railings, rotten floors and improperly vented heaters. Several private organizations provide information and referral services and even financial aid to tenants.

Tenants Services and Housing Counseling (TSHC) has provided housing services to low and moderate-income residents of Fayette County since 1971. Last year, they served a total of 2,083 households, including 539 that received financial assistance to make rent or mortgage payments. TSHC estimated that another 1,500 client households needed similar financial assistance.

TSHC is successful in responding to only one out of five requests for relocation. The overall vacancy rate in Fayette County is seven percent, according to Irene Gooding, Administrator of TSHC.

"For affordable housing, it's zero percent," she said. On her way to her office each morning, Irene passes an attractive new apartment building, as yet unoccupied.

"It's sitting there with all those bathrooms empty!" she exclaimed in frustration.

In McCracken County in Western Kentucky, emergency rent and utilities assistance are available from the Family Service Society. August of 1988 was the heaviest service month ever for the non-profit organization, which also provides other forms of emergency relief to families in need.

In Jefferson County, the Louisville Tenants Union, Inc. (LTU) educates tenants about their rights and responsibilities, conducts mediations in landlord-tenant disputes, and provides shelter referrals to families on the verge of homelessness. LTU's most typical client is a young mother with preschool-aged children. The eighteen- year-old organization served 2,087 tenant families in 1987. In the first six months of 1988, they already had served 1,436 families, indicating that the demand for their services is on the rise.

Housing Codes, Helpful But Not a Total Answer

Fayette County has a housing code as do both Louisville and Jefferson County. However, their existence does not mean that all rental property in those areas complies with the codes. Tenants may be unaware of their rights and uncertain of how to enforce them. Through Linda Davis of the Louisville Tenants Union, for example, I met a woman who lived two months in a rental home in Jefferson County where there was no hot water or gas service.

Other clients have problems that are not addressed by housing codes. One young couple who lives in an eight-plex in Jefferson County, for example, questioned the legality of their lawyer-landlord's method of assessing utilities. Their apartment does not have a separate utility meter. Under their lease, however, they are required to pay their own utilities. Each month their landlord sends a copy of the utility bill for the entire building. The landlord obliterates the utility company's charge and instead writes in his estimate of the couple's share of the utility bill.

"Nobody has ever asked me that question before," the landlord told the couple when they asked him to explain how he calculated their share of the bill.

The same couple had spent $50 on cleaners, including eight bottles of Lysol, to clean their apartment when they moved in.

"I scrubbed," said the wife. "When I washed this carpet, my feet were yellow for at least two weeks from stains and it's still dirty." Why did they decide to live in an apartment that was filthy when they first saw it? Originally from Kentucky, they had lived in Texas most recently and were not unemployed. All other prospective landlords had required six month's rent in advance.

The Need and Value of Decent, Affordable Housing

Having decent, affordable housing is a prerequisite to a low-income family's ability to address other issues in their lives that will enable them to become more independent. Further, the availability

of decent, affordable housing to low-income families can prevent those families from joining the ranks of the homeless. Thus, many people were disappointed when the Kentucky Department of Local Government removed housing totally as one of four funding categories under the Small Cities Community Block Grant last summer. As a result of the restructuring of the grant, more federal dollars funneled to Kentucky through the block grant will be spent on public facilities and economic development. However, most of the money previously allocated to housing under the block grant is being diverted to the third funding category, special projects.

Problems created by homelessness, substandard housing, and lack of housing would be eased by the following steps:

- Kentucky should fund more programs which shelter homeless families while helping such families become more independent. Though only a short-term solution, shelters are needed to enable families to stay together. The provision of support services to help parents gain skills and knowledge which can lead to greater self-sufficiency may decrease the likelihood of repeated homelessness.

- Kentucky should offer low-interest loans to landlords and owners who wish to add basic services like running water, indoor plumbing, and heat to their properties. Decent housing is a prerequisite to low-income families being able to address other issues in their lives that may enable them to become more independent.

- Kentucky should provide incentives to counties which enact housing codes which require the provision of basic services such as heat, water, and electricity to tenants.

"I never lived anywhere long enough to put out a garden. We'd live [at one place] until the rent was due, stay there long enough for the landlord to go to court, [then] right before we were going to be evicted, we'd move. Either that or we'd stay on some creek bank until [my husband] did some tobacco work enough to pay $75 or $100 for the first week or two's rent and con the landlord in another town and let us move in there. Then we'd move in there and stay till we wore our welcome off and we're off."

"What do you mean you lived on a creek bank?" I asked.

"We had a station wagon and we [Adele, her husband, and two daughters, now aged five and six] lived in our car lots of times."

Adele Lawrence, 38-year-old mother
Rockcastle County
June 27, 1988

However, the incentive program must be designed so that it does not decrease the supply of affordable homes. Without housing codes, substandard homes will continue to be rented to families who simply cannot afford decent housing.

- Kentucky should restore housing as a funding category under the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program. The recent elimination of housing as a funding category will result in the diversion of thousands

of federal dollars which would have been spent on housing for low-income Kentuckians. Instead, most of these funds will be spent on unspecified "special projects."

- Kentucky should provide financial support to organizations whose mission is to increase housing for low-income Kentuckians. Affordable, decent housing is in short supply. As stated earlier, such housing is a prerequisite to families being able to address other issues in their lives.

- The Kentucky Housing Corporation should continue to approve bond issues to finance mortgages for families of low or moderate income. As stated in state legislation governing the Corporation, the serious shortage of affordable, decent, safe, and sanitary housing in our state "is inimical to the health, safety, welfare and prosperity of all residents of the Commonwealth and to the sound growth of Kentucky communities." The availability of affordable, decent housing to low and moderate income families may prevent homelessness and certainly will improve the quality of life for the affected families.

Tammy Jergen's Story

"If I was younger, I'd go back to school."

Tammy Jergen seemed much older than her seventeen years when she uttered those words to me last spring. Despite the finality in her voice, I couldn't resist responding, "Seventeen isn't all that old, Tammy." She smiled but obviously did not agree.

We were talking in the bright sun in the parking lot behind Welcome House. I was sitting on a sheet of cardboard with my tape recorder propped up between us. Even without the sounds of nearby city traffic, it would have been hard to hear Tammy. She had a quiet voice and a quiet way. Her features were sweet and doll- like. She seemed too small and too delicate to be at Welcome House, the only local shelter for homeless women.

It was hot in the parking lot but the shelter itself was absolutely stifling. A small, three-story brick building in downtown Covington, Welcome House has no air conditioning and not nearly enough fans. Its grateful residents do not complain about the cramped, close quarters or the kitchen chores and other duties they perform in exchange for temporary shelter.

"My mom took off when I was fourteen," Tammy explained as she began to tell me how she had come to be at Welcome House. "She was an alcoholic." Tammy's maternal grandfather wanted her to live with him when Tammy's mother left. State social services staff, however, did not believe he was capable. As a result, Tammy—who has never met her father—has spent most of the last three years in state foster homes.

Tammy's maternal grandfather had died just weeks before my interview. "He was my last relative," she said sadly. Her only other family are two half- sisters and her seven-month old daughter, Amanda.

Tammy fears her half-sisters will be adopted by different families and that she'll never see them again. Even now she's not allowed to visit one sister. "They say she can't handle seeing me and me not being there the next day."

I asked Tammy to tell me more about her experiences in foster care. "She [her foster mother] had one bedroom for all the foster

kids," Tammy began. "I stayed in there, my two little sisters stayed in there, another foster girl stayed in there and her two granddaughters stayed in there. And there was one window in the whole bedroom. That tells you how small it was. There was a big giant bed — and me and my two sisters slept in it. Her two granddaughters slept in a twin bed and the other foster girl slept in a bed."

"I remember this," she continued. "When they first took us to that foster home, my worker came back to visit. Beth [one of her younger sisters] would always say 'Come back and see my room.' And my foster mother would say, 'Oh it's a mess back there. You don't want to go back there.' She knew it was a health hazard or a fire hazard." Sharing a bed with two other children is an obvious physical discomfort. However, the toll on Tammy's emotional security while she was in foster care was more damaging. "They didn't like me," Tammy said simply of one home. I looked at her and found it difficult to believe that someone could not like Tammy.

"They liked my sisters," she said. "I guess because they were real young and cute. They wanted me to go to school in the daytime while they watched my baby and go to work at night. [Earlier] they wanted me to get out in the field and set tobacco when I was pregnant. I wasn't going to set tobacco so I ran away."

Children like Tammy who are in foster care are "committed" to the state. They are wards of the state under the care and protection of the state. Although the abuse she suffered while in foster care was distressing to Tammy, it was an unsympathetic judge who finally precipitated her fleeing from her foster home and becoming homeless.

"They [her social workers] were going to release my commitment," she told me. "They said go ahead and pack your bags. You're going to be moving out. The judge is going to let you go." After feeling so rejected in the foster home, she was excited and pleased by the social worker's prediction. Unfortunately though, "the judge had his mind up," she said.

"He said come back in two weeks. If you have a job, I'll let you go." Tammy was seventeen and living without any means of transportation in a tiny town called California, eight miles off Route 10 in Campbell County.

"If you get a job and get a babysitter, I'll let you go," the judge declared. The conditions he set would have been difficult for anyone to meet, but especially a teenager with no car, no income and no diploma, in a town with a population of less than 200 people. Tammy ran away and after a short stay at a shelter for runaways, was referred to Welcome House.

> "They're real strict. Hopefully when I talk to them, they'll have an exception to the rule [that public housing tenants' visitors cannot stay more than two weeks]. I got put in the hospital before and my child went from one friend to the other friend that wasn't good and she was real confused about it.
>
> "She got the feeling that nobody wanted her. That had me upset while I was in the hospital. This time I wasn't as upset about it because [my mom was in my apartment] taking care of her and she would have somebody to talk to about it."
>
> *Debbie Montgomery*
> *Johnson County*
> *August 17, 1988*

"My kids are going to have the best I can give them," Tammy told me. "I'm not staying on welfare. There's no way!" My first interview with Tammy was May 31. A week later, I called to see if I could meet her again and learn more about her childhood. Although she had refused to let me photograph her or Amanda, she readily consented to further conversation. I arrived at Welcome House on June 14 as we had agreed, but learned she had left the shelter with her baby the previous Thursday.

"She did not say where she was going," a member of the Welcome House staff told me.

Hazel Summers' Story

"We just heard a big boom," said Hazel Summers as she described the fire which, two months later, was finally precipitating her move to another home. "We went downstairs and everything was on fire. We got the hose from my neighbor across the street and we kicked the window in to try to put the fire out while we was waiting on the fire department. My neighbor across the street, I yelled for them to call the fire department, which it took them about five or ten minutes to come."

Damage from the fire which occurred July 10, 1988, was very apparent when I visited the Summers' Jefferson County home September 2. The basement had no working light fixtures but late afternoon sunlight streamed through several small windows, all of them broken. Clotheslines crossed and recrossed the small concrete room and a green washing machine, now useless, stood in one corner. "It's paid for," Hazel said, with a sigh "and I was washing every day, too." The fire destroyed the washing machine, almost a necessity for a family of nine.

"We were upstairs watching TV," Hazel explained. "My son came downstairs to get a pair of pants off the line. He said he fell against the furnace when he was reaching up. The fire department said it wasn't my fault. It was faulty wiring." The family lost more

The landlord removed the paneling from the front door of Hazel Summers' Jefferson County home for repairs. The "temporary" screen was not replaced during Ms. Summers' seven-month tenancy.

than a washing machine and the clean clothes which were drying on the lines. All their winter coats, sweaters, and blue jeans were stored downstairs, too. The damage went beyond the basement of their rented home. After the fire, sparks began flying from the plug of the family's refrigerator. Hazel used a cooler briefly to keep milk and other food cold. Later she and her husband moved the heavy appliance across the room to another plug. "I come in here and check it just about every night and make sure it's not smoking," she said as she opened the door. Inside inches of ice lined the freezer section but little else was in it.

"You don't have any food," I said.

"I brought home some cereal," she answered apologetically, pointing at a box of cornflakes on the sink. A large box of powdered milk was nearby.

"Would you be embarrassed if I photographed the inside of your refrigerator?" I asked.

"I would," she said, "because I don't have any food in there.

"I went and got my food stamps yesterday," she went on, "and I told the kids as soon as we get up there [a home they would move to that evening] and get in, I'm going to the grocery." The family has been eating cold cuts since the fire.

"My kids are getting sick," she said. "I was cooking on a hot plate when we had the fire and it burned out the hot plate."

The Summers had almost finished moving the day I visited. Boxes, bags, and piles of clothing and household goods filled the front room. "Mama, are we taking my bed?" one of the younger

The kitchen and basement windows are broken at Hazel Summers' home. The screen door, which has no screen inserts, is not attached to the house. The triangle imprint above the door shows where the back porch roof was attached before it fell during Ms. Summers' tenancy.

children asked in an anxious voice. "Yes, we're taking everybody's bed," she reassured him. One of the ragged twin mattresses propped

up against a wall must have been his. The carpeting was dirty, the drapes makeshift, and flies were everywhere.

I expressed my surprise that Hazel had volunteered to meet with me when her personal life was in such upheaval. "I need help," she said. "I don't have any way to cook and I don't have any hot water to take a bath. We've been taking cold baths since the fire."

Exasperated, Hazel had told the landlord she planned to move before September. "He told me, if you stay here Thursday [September 1], you owe me this month's [September's] rent."

She had found a new home, but she could not arrange for a truck to pick up her belongings until September 2. Hazel assumes the landlord will keep her $200 deposit and will do nothing to replace her washing machine. Yet she paid her rent on time every month and lived the last two months without hot water or any means of cooking. According to Linda Davis of the Louisville Tenants Union, Hazel is entitled to a refund for any rent she paid since the date of the fire. To get it, however, Hazel Summers will undoubtedly have to go to Small Claims Court.

"He [the landlord] told me that if I was ready to move out, he had somebody ready to move in," Hazel told me in amazement. "He knows there's no gas, no heat whatsoever, but he's renting it out to somebody else!" she exclaimed.

"I wonder if he had fire insurance," I said.

"Evidently he did," Hazel replied, "because a man came out and looked at it [the furnace]. I thought he'd come out to fix it. The only thing he told me was, 'You need a new furnace.' He left and I ain't seen him since."

During the seven months the Summers rented the three-bedroom frame home, other people also came by, ostensibly to make repairs. Hazel's front door has an opening for a window or paneling about two feet wide and three feet high. The opening is covered by a torn screen now. There is nothing to keep out flies, not to mention intruders.

When the family first rented the place, the landlord himself took the panel out of the front door, presumably for repair, but "he never did bring it back. The sink is messed up in the kitchen, he never did fix it. The faucet comes off when you use it. The only thing he did was send people out to look at it."

After moving in, Hazel noticed that her windows did not lock. Locks seem fairly irrelevant, though, given the lack of a window in the front door, the broken windows in the basement, and a missing window from a recent break-in in back.

The roof over the small back porch fell off during the summer. "I'm so glad they weren't sitting on the steps," Hazel said, referring to her children. The broken roof lay beside the house, incongruously near some delicate flowering shrubbery.

"The landlord told me not to worry," she said, as if she had expected he would hold her liable for the damage. The aluminum screen door at the back was superfluous; it had no screen or glass and no hinges. To exit through the back door, it was necessary to pick up the door and set it to the side.

Hazel Summers lived in a public housing project for seven years prior to her seven months in the fire-damaged house. "When I got married, my husband and I wanted to live in a house, but we didn't know it would be like this." One of their first problems was a toilet

that didn't work. On the tour she gave me, she removed the lid of her toilet and showed me the part she had replaced.

She also showed me dangling ceiling lights that, in her words, are "trying to fall." Despite the inadequacy of the home, Hazel plans to leave it clean. "It was clean when I moved in," she said. She also had purchased supplies to repair damage caused when her children opened doors too quickly, leaving an indentation in the plaster walls.

The Louisville Tenants Union is working with Hazel Summers. However, she is one of over 1,400 clients they have counseled in the first six months of 1988. Their small staff — a director, a tenant counselor, and two part-time receptionists — can provide very little individual attention. Nonetheless, they advised Hazel Summers on how to document the damage and lack of basic necessities she had endured since the fire so that she can seek a refund of some of her rent in Small Claims Court.

Louise Gardner's Story

"I've been trying to find an apartment that would accept two children in a two-bedroom. Either they're too high or they don't accept children in a two- bedroom apartment. One apartment complex even said they couldn't take me because I had rust on my car and it made their apartment complex look bad!"

Louise Gardner was living at the Women's Crisis Center in Northern Kentucky, when she and I talked last May. She hoped to move out soon. Her lack of housing was only the most recent in a list of crises she has faced in her 23 years. When Louise was twelve, her mother died of cancer and her father of a heart attack. Louise, her brother, and two sisters moved in with their aunt and uncle, but "my uncle didn't want us there. He had a daughter who was pregnant at

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LAUNDRY HRS. ONLY!

Monday	8-8:30
Tuesday	8-5
Wednesday	8-8:30
Thursday	8-5
Friday	8-5
Saturday	8-4
Sunday and holidays	CLOSED

Maintenance people can't change these hrs don't ask (except employees)

Sign at laundromat at public housing in Lexington, Kentucky on Tuesday, August 2, 1988. A tenant told me the laundromat had been closed since the previous Thursday.

sixteen and he swore up and down I'd be the next one. Every other day he would kick me out of the house."

Eventually, Louise's brother and sisters left their aunt and uncle's home. Louise joined her siblings when she was eighteen. However, when her boyfriend, Juan, asked her to live with him, she readily agreed. "I've always depended on somebody," she told me regretfully.

Juan, who had lost his job, abused Louise after they began living together. Although she was pregnant, Louise left him. She received food stamps during her pregnancy. Her sisters helped her meet her

living expenses. Her rent at the time was $175 per month. After Stephen was born, Louise became eligible for $170 in monthly benefits from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Obviously, the AFDC check was inadequate so long as she was obligated to pay $175 in rent. Still, if she had married Juan, she would have been ineligible to receive even the small AFDC grant.

"I didn't want to get married just because I was going to have a baby," she told me. She also was not sure she wanted to marry Juan at all. They did, however, reunite after he got a better job. Louise was glad to leave the AFDC rolls. "The way I was raised," she said, "there wasn't anybody who'd ever been on AFDC in my family."

Eventually Louise moved to Indianapolis, where Juan had been transferred. She had a miscarriage shortly thereafter and then, almost immediately, became pregnant with Charles, who is now one year old. Because of new incidents of abuse, Louise and Juan's relationship is probably over.

A new full-time factory job has given Louise the confidence that she can become independent. She wants to depend on no one but herself. "I get paid more in one week than one month's AFDC check," she said proudly. Still, finding affordable, safe housing for herself and the two boys is a major obstacle. Rent for a decent apartment in Northern Kentucky will probably cost over $300 a month.

"Section 8 [the federal program that subsidizes rentals to low-income families] has a huge waiting list," Louise said. "A few weeks ago, they told me there were a little over 200 people in front of me. That could take up to a year or more. What would I do in the meantime?

"You practically have to live in the slums to pay $150 a month," she explained, "but then you could get mugged or killed or anything could happen. It's not a very good environment for the kids to grow up in."

Louise Gardner struck me as a very determined young woman and not one to dwell on the past. "I've been through a whole lot," she admitted. Clearly though, it is the future that interests Louise.

"That's one thing about the women who come into a shelter," a staff person at the Women's Crisis Center told me. "Regardless of what they've gone through — maybe because of what they've gone through — they have an inner strength. People who aren't in the shelter think of women who've been battered as being weak. But a lot of times, they're really not. They're really strong people."

If strength and determination count for anything, Louise Gardner will find a decent apartment for herself and her children. She will stick with her factory job and make a better life for herself and her sons. If it all comes to fruition, "This will be the first time, I'll really be living on my own," she said, "the first time."

Brenda Lincoln's Story

"He [the landlord] figures for $50 a month, there's no sense in doing a whole lot. He come down here and said you all going to do all that, you got to move. We were going to fix it up — carpet and fix that porch and the ceiling." Brenda Lincoln's statement about her landlord's refusal to let her improve her rented home at her own expense is a new twist on an old story.

All over rural Kentucky, landlords rent substandard houses for very modest sums. Presumably, few tenants would be able or willing

to fit home improvements into the family budget. Brenda and Stewart Lincoln, however, were able and were willing — but were told if they made improvements, they would have to move out! Their eighty-year-old landlord is a "nice guy" who lives on the same property.

The porch and front door of Brenda Lincoln's Franklin County home. A hand pump 100 feet or so from the house is the family's source of water.

The Lincoln's home in rural Franklin County is less than ten miles from the State Capitol. The carpet Brenda wants to install undoubtedly would make the house much warmer. There are no big buildings and few trees nearby to break the sharp winds which must whistle under and around the house every winter. The porch Brenda wants to repair is rickety in places. Several pots of flowers that Brenda has nurtured through the dry summer adorn the wobbly rails and sagging steps of the porch. The ceiling Brenda wants to fix has been drywalled but was never finished or painted.

The house has no running water. "We just wash a load a day," she told me, "because nobody wants to pack that much water." They draw their water from a well a hundred feet or so down the slope from the front of the house. Their refrigerator, a used one, was given to them by a friend.

A wood stove and kerosene heaters — purchased by the Lincolns — will heat the two-story wood house this winter. "We just move the kids downstairs for the winter," Brenda said, explaining that it would be too dangerous for them to have a stove upstairs.

Brenda has not let the landlord's decision keep her from making her living room as pleasant as she can. The furniture is old and worn and there is no carpet. Still, the room has a certain warmth to it — from Brenda herself, from the sunshine coming in a window, from books on a shelf, and from several color photographs of her children that decorate the walls. A cloth curtain serves as a divider between the living room and another room at the back of the house.

If you park at the road as I did one day last September, you must walk over a narrow, unsteady plank, which spans a gully 3 feet deep and some 15 or 20 feet wide, to reach Brenda's home. While I was visiting, a school bus dropped off two of the older children, who came

> "I had an emergency with him [a thirteen-month-old son] last week. He fell off the bed and hit the back of his head. That's one thing about the housing over there is the concrete floors. It looks like tile but it's basically concrete underneath it. He fell and the whole side of his head was one big knot and it scared me."
>
> *Katie Morgan*
> *Fayette County*
> *August 28, 1988*

shouting and skipping across the plank like acrobats on a tight wire. "The quietness just left!" Brenda remarked good naturedly.

Stewart's new job at a junkyard has been a godsend to the family. For the first three or four months, Stewart walked the ten miles to the job and the ten miles back home. The Lincolns now have a used truck for transportation.

Food stamps and a garden helped balance the family budget last summer and fall. Brenda remembers a time when Stewart was not working and they were living in a more expensive place. "I mean it's not so bad on us because he's working," she told me, "but before he started working, we was paying $200 a month. Well, the rent was $200 and the light bill got up to over $100. That's why we didn't have lights!" she laughed.

Brenda has earned her GED and wants further education or training. She cannot drive and, besides, she told me, "I have to be here when the kids get home." She would like to enroll in a correspondence course or perhaps study via Kentucky Educational Television. Although reception of the KET channel is poor where she lives, she would register if it were not for the $129 tuition. "All I was wanting was bookkeeping or accounting or something like that. I've done it once, but it was so long ago," she told me.

Brenda's youngest child and only daughter, Sally, is four. She had fallen asleep on the bus that brought her home from Headstart the day I visited. Sally came into the house with tousled hair, sleepy eyes, and a slightly grumpy disposition. Brenda gave her a hug and told her to lie down in the next room. I looked in and noticed some corn husk flowers on the bed. Brenda is learning how to make them and hopes to sell them to a florist. She told me she was very slow but hopes to pick up speed with practice.

After a few minutes of rest, Sally was up. She came into the living room where her mother helped her change out of her jeans and into shorts so that she could join her older brothers outside. It was much warmer than it had been at 7 a.m. when the four-year-old had boarded her Headstart bus. As her mother helped her change, I noticed that Sally was wearing little boys' underpants.

All the children were soon playing together and obviously enjoying themselves. Occasionally one would burst into the house to ask a question or get something. Brenda is very pleased that the family lives in the country. "It's better raising them out here than it is in town," she told me. "They just like to rip and run and they can't do that in town."

Regardless of whether Brenda Lincoln is ever able to repair her home or take her KET class, I have the distinct impression that she will continue to make decisions about her life that revolve around

what is best for her children. Living in the shadow of the State Capitol has not given her any advantage over other low-income mothers but she seems determined to do the best she can with what she has.

Jenny Ford's Story

I met Jenny Ford the day before her twenty-fourth birthday. At the time, she was living in Covington at the Ida Spence Housing Project in one of ten apartments designated for homeless families. Jenny and her two children had been placed there through the Transitional Housing program of the Northern Kentucky Community Center. The program has been in operation since October of 1987.

"I didn't have a place to live," Jenny told me, explaining how she had come to live at Ida Spence. "I was staying with my sisters, really wherever I could, and my social worker found out about it. If you don't have a place to live, it's bad for your kids." Jenny's social worker called the Transitional Housing program and, last March, Jenny moved in.

Having lived in six different apartments over the last two years, she is very grateful to have a more permanent home. As the name of the program implies, however, her apartment is to be used only as a transitional home.

The goal of the program is to provide enough training and material support to enable families to leave the program and become more independent. The program relies heavily on donations to provide residents with furniture, linens, kitchenware, and other household supplies. Budgeting, meal-planning, shopping, and job-hunting are some of the topics program staff and social services personnel discuss with residents.

"She helps me out with what I'm supposed to eat, recipes to make, and stuff like that," Jenny explained, describing assistance provided to her by a nutritionist who works with the program.

"Now [that I've learned I'm anemic], I'm looking out for what I should be eating. I'm supposed to be eating food that's high in iron.

"This month I had my food stamps taken, so I can't get much. I bought a few groceries," Jenny said, gesturing toward the counter where a loaf of bread and several empty egg cartons and gallon-sized plastic milk jugs lay.

Jenny Ford, with Hannah, age two, and Tommy, age five, a formerly homeless family from Northern Kentucky.

"What happened?" I asked.

"When I finished shopping, I slipped my food stamps and food stamp ID in a yellow envelope down in a grocery bag," she replied. "I took the cart outside and then I looked in every one of the bags. I couldn't even find it. They won't replace them," she said in despair. "My caseworker gave me the name of some people that might help. I'm supposed to call and see what they can do. That's what I got to do today," she continued.

"Do you have a telephone?" I asked.

"If my friend's home across the way, I use her phone. If not, I have to go somewhere else because I can't use a pay phone," she answered.

"Why not?" I wondered.

"I don't have the money. You have to budget. I got my [AFDC] check at the first of the month. I have to wait til a certain day comes up in the month to get my food stamps. I come up on the sixth this month.

"As soon as I got my check, I had to get food because we did not have any food in the house [because her food stamps had been stolen]. I had to use practically all of my check. I got some of what I needed, but not all. I made sure I had diapers for her," she said, pointing at Hannah, her two-year-old daughter, who was playing at our feet. "I've got to have diapers."

Jenny thinks Hannah is ready to be toilet trained. "I need training pants for her. I've got a potty but no training pants," she said. Somewhere in the process of moving so many times, Jenny had lost the training pants used by her son, Tommy, now five years old.

As we talked, Hannah scribbled on a piece of paper where she was playing on the kitchen floor. Art work by both Hannah and Tommy was taped to the kitchen walls.

Alice Jones' disability check is the family's only income. She and her two daughters qualify for food stamps and medical cards. She is extremely grateful to Frontier Housing, an organization that builds and rehabilitates homes for purchase by low-income families.

"They had looked for over one year for a house that I could afford. They took a big chance on me," she said. "At the time I purchased the house I was just drawing AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] — $246 a month. I had three kids under eighteen years of age."

Prior to moving into her new house in Rowan County, Alice lived in a trailer with two beds that weren't even "half beds." Her girls shared one and Alice slept on her side in the other. It was so cold in the winter in the trailer, "You couldn't put your feet on the floor."

The new house, where Alice and her girls have lived the last two years, is one the housing corporation originally planned to destroy. It was built as a three-room house but had been added onto several times. Frontier Housing repaired and remodeled it into a three-bedroom home. Alice's monthly disability check of $542 makes it is much easier to pay her $98 mortgage than when her sole income was a $246 AFDC check.

While Jenny tries to provide stability for her two young children, she also is trying to meet her own health needs. She was five months pregnant and had been suffering from morning sickness and exhaustion when I met her. Her apartment is not air conditioned and the heat was debilitating. She has a Medicaid card and attends the health clinic in Covington.

"Jenny, where did the system fail you?" I asked her, not sure how she would interpret the question.

"Not enough money," she answered quickly. "I get $207 a month for me and two kids. Living here I could afford it [but not anywhere else]."

Jenny concluded with a beautifully simple deduction. "If I had everything I need, not what I want," she said, "if I had everything I need, I could make it."

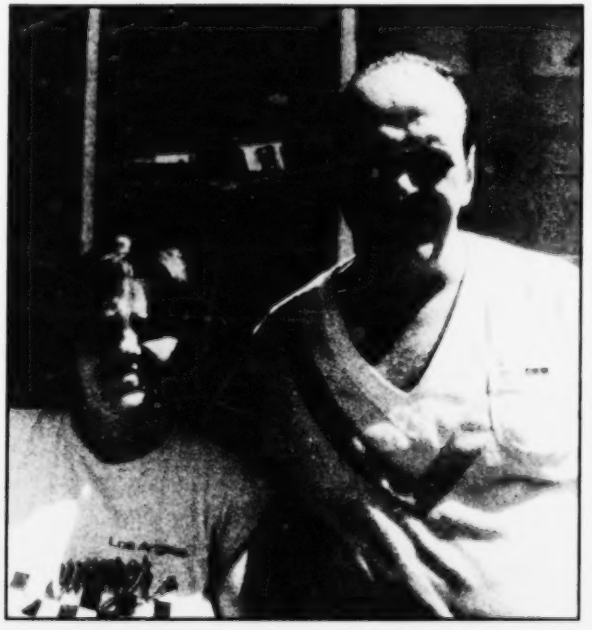
An Introduction to Bill Jenkins

"I'm out trying to work and trying to make it. Maybe we ain't got that much money, but at least I'm out there trying to work at it," Bill Jenkins told me. He is employed at a fast food restaurant in Bellevue, Kentucky, where his shift begins at 4 in the afternoon.

"I'll have to leave out of here about 2 p.m.," he told me. The Ida Spence Public Housing Project in Covington where Bill lives is not far from Bellevue. However, bus schedules and routes do not permit Bill to leave any later and be sure of being on time. Although he would like a job closer to home ("I miss my family when I'm there"), Bill is grateful to be employed.

Bill, his wife, and two children, aged one and two, are a formerly homeless family. They were placed at Ida Spence Housing Project through the Northern Kentucky Community Center's Transitional Housing program. Program staff select tenants for ten apartments were formerly homeless families can live for up to six months. I visited Bill and his family just four day after their move to Ida Spence.

"How does it look?" he asked eagerly. Bill's question was directed at Laura Abdul-Majid, Coordinator of the Transitional Housing program, who had introduced me to the Jenkins. The apartment was neat and spotless and Laura complimented him on it.



Jean and Bill Jenkins, outside the apartment where they were placed by the Northern Kentucky Community Center's Transitional Shelter Program.

When I asked Bill how his family came to be homeless, his answer was simple. "I didn't have any money for the rent." With his new job and the support of the Transitional Housing program, Bill's family should have a chance to catch up, or maybe even get ahead.

Nora Crandall's Story

Nora Crandall's front yard is more dust than grass. She lives at the Bluegrass-Aspendale Apartments, a public housing project in Fayette County. The drought this summer ravaged her already dreary neighborhood. Nonetheless, she is grateful to have a place to live.

Nora's front door was open when I arrived at her apartment one afternoon in September. I leaned in and said "Hello!" but she did not hear me at first over the sounds of her wringer washing machine. When she did hear me, she greeted me warmly and asked me to join her at the kitchen table.

"I had a home that fell in on me," she began. "It was in Jessamine County. It wasn't a very good home. The ceiling in the kitchen absorbed a lot of water and started holding it when it was raining last Christmas. Then it couldn't hold it any longer so it all dropped out. That was a Christmas present!" she told me, with a chuckle.

Nora and her three children continued to live in the home for several weeks. "It [the ceiling that fell] was just the kitchen part. It was cold in there, too. I took and boarded up the door and just used the front two rooms of it for us to sleep.

"He [the landlord] promised me when I moved in it last October [1987] that he would put a bathroom in. There was no water, no bath facilities whatever on this property. You had to go carry your water from wherever you could get water from. The well wouldn't even hold water. You couldn't even have water hauled to you and put in the well. "Something told me the first of December not to pay no rent. I went and spent it on the kids for Christmas. He [the landlord] could have drilled another well.

Nora Crandall is grateful to be living with her three children in public housing in Fayette County, Kentucky. The kitchen ceiling of her rented home in Jessamine County "fell in on her" last Christmas.

"My kids had to miss school there, while we was at the Salvation Army [emergency housing where they lived temporarily] and I couldn't have it for them not to go to school," she said. "They was missing their education."

Nora and her family then left their Jessamine County home and moved to Fayette County. However, they moved back to Jessamine County when "my mom wrote me a real sad letter and got me upset."

While living in Jessamine County the second time, Nora found a job in a Lexington diner. She had no car. "I was walking back and forth to work and had me a down payment paid on my car and the only thing I needed was a $100 advance from my check to pay my insurance and they wouldn't give it to me. I said, 'Fine, I can't endanger my life no more and walk to work.'"

"How far were you walking?" I asked in amazement.

"All the way from the Jessamine County line to way up here on New Circle Road," she said, indicating a distance of almost ten miles. She was employed no more than two months, but they were two of the hottest months in Kentucky's history.

Nora's move to Fayette County has disqualified her, at least temporarily, from a federal job training program she attended in Jessamine County. Nonetheless, she earned her GED recently and hopes to become a registered nurse.

"I planned on working on my LPN [licensed practical nurse] and finding a job and putting myself through [for the registered nurse degree]," she said. "It's been my life dream, but it's not got to come true." "Would you like to move to Jessamine County again if you could find a decent place to live?" I asked.

"I like it, but there's no jobs there," she said. "There is no excitement there, no place to take the kids out rollerskating or to do anything with the kids.

"The only thing they got down there is drinking and drugs. Drugs are bad here, too. It scares me that that's something you're not going to get away from. I've got my little boy in Cub Scouts. There's things here for them to do."

Nora's children, aged five, eight, and ten, came in from school as she and I talked. They clamored for her attention, telling her about their day, showing her school papers, asking her questions, and generally making it quite evident that their mother was a very special friend. She obviously returned their affection.

"My children make me strong," Nora said. "My children are my life, they are my pride and joy. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have no reason to be here on this earth."

A Trailer 10 By 43 Feet

Emma Washington is grateful to own the 100 foot lot in Bath County where the family's 12 by 70 foot, three-bedroom trailer sits. She remembers a time when they lived in a trailer that measured a scant 10 by 43 feet. She, her husband, and their three daughters shared one bed in the tiny trailer while her mother-in- law slept in the other bed.

"I got real sick after the twins were born," she recalled. "They had to do emergency surgery on me at seven-and- one-half months to take them. They had only fifteen minutes to do it in or I would have died, me and the twins both.

"I went into labor premature and they thought it was three instead of two, so they gave me a choice: if I wanted to wait 48 hours to help strengthen them, for them to live, and for me to die. I chose for them to live," she tearfully recollected.

"It got so bad in the [10 by 43 foot] trailer, we had roaches real bad. And one night I had them [the twins] in the crib and I woke up. They were turning and they were beating them [the roaches] with their hands. They were covered with roaches and I didn't have nothing to spray with. We didn't have no money.

"Caroline was going like this," she said, sobbing as she showed me how her little daughter tried to brush away the roaches. "Her face was covered.

"I tried to kill myself," Emma said, describing the most desperate time in her life. "I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't take seeing them like that. And I didn't want to give my babies up because I love them dearly.

"We have tried so hard. Neither one of us drink or take pills. George [her husband] works what he can. So then Mommy went to the bank and borrowed the money and bought the new trailer," she said thankfully as she took a deep breath. Her mother, the widow of a serviceman, had become entitled to benefits from the Veterans Administration and thus had the means to help.

Even with land and a home, Emma and George are always struggling to get by. "We barely did make last month's electric bill and right now, I owe a $500 drug store bill."

The drugs, previously not covered by Medicaid, are for seizures Emma has experienced since the time of a head injury she sustained in infancy.

Emma mentioned several times how grateful she is to have her family and how lucky she is to have a husband like George. Her love for him and their children sustains her and gives her the strength to help families who have even less than hers. She has started a clothes closet and is a volunteer at the Christian Social Service Center in Owingsville, the Bath County seat.

"I found some kids up the road last year," she told me. "They were sleeping on lawn chairs. That's all they had to sleep on, lawn chairs. I was lucky enough to have beds for all of mine," she said, remembering the 10 by 43 trailer where the whole family slept in one bed.

"It didn't dawn on me what the covers was doing on the lawn chairs [at first]. I went home and took Chrissy and Caroline's bed down, they're bunk beds and I took 'em up and gave 'em to the kids. I knowed some day I'd get another set."

Emma did find other beds for her girls and she continues her volunteer work with other families when she can. "Last year I helped 22 kids have Christmas," she told me. "You don't tell a kid at Christmas that Santa don't love them."

4 EDUCATION: "THE PATH TO A LARGER LIFE"

Comments and Recommendations

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

I asked dozens of children and young people that question last summer and fall. The answers revealed a great deal. I met no aspiring firefighters or astronauts, no would-be movie stars or bank presidents. One Western Kentucky teen hopes to become a nuclear physicist and a Floyd County girl plans to become a "heart doctor." Many youth want to teach, generally because of cherished memories of a favorite teacher in elementary school. Children in several counties answered my question simply, "I want a job."

The Link Between Education, Employment, and Independence

The late Edward F. Prichard, Jr., believed that education was the first step "to a larger life." The phrase "path to a larger life," which we have borrowed for our chapter title, comes from a recent book by that name published by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, Indeed, many people I met last summer and fall were proof of Mr. Prichard's belief. At the very least, many people had found education was a prerequisite to employment.

"Before I got my GED, I went around to [a prospective employer] and they would not even give me an application to fill out," said a resident of Rockcastle County. "They want a higher education. They told me, 'When you get it, come back.'"

Under a law enacted in 1986 by the Kentucky General Assembly, low-income high school students can receive textbooks without charge. School students who qualify for free and reduced price lunches automatically qualify for the free textbook program. Following are the maximum monthly income guidelines for both programs. Students who qualify for either lunch program qualify for free books.

Family Size	Free Lunch	Reduced Price
1	$ 626	$ 890
2	838	1,192
3	1,050	1,494
4	1,263	1,797
5	1,475	2,099
6	1,687	2,401
7	1,900	2,703
8	2,112	3,005
For more add:	213	303

Under the law, students who receive free or reduced lunches and free textbooks must not be identified or embarrassed.

Information from a Western Kentucky Legal Services Programs Flyer, dated August 10, 1988.

A bus stop in Bell County, where 60 percent of the adult population lacks a high school education.

The woman's husband had had a similar experience. After working on the maintenance staff of a small college, he moved out of state for several years. Upon his return, he tried to get his old job back, but without a high school education, "He couldn't even get a job pushing a lawnmower."

The link between education, employment, and independence was not lost on any of the people I interviewed. To a person, the parents I met want their children to finish school. They see college in their children's future, though the squalid physical surroundings of many of these families make dreams of any kind seem incongruous, almost surrealistic.

"Janie's got it in her mind," a woman from Harlan County told me, speaking of her twelve-year-old's desire for a higher education.

Because of the heat last summer, Janie's home had but one usable room. My interview of Janie's mother was conducted on an old iron bed in front of the one small fan the family of six owned. I could see light through cracks in the walls of the darkened bedroom. Janie's mother completed only the eighth grade, but she wants her four children "to grow up and make their own way, not to depend on anybody else."

Without college, Janie and other young people will have a difficult time fitting into a world in which jobs are increasingly complex. A recent report by the Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship bemoans the "economic limbo of unemployment, part-time jobs, and poverty wages" that non-college-educated youth can expect. The average annual earnings of a young man who has only a high school diploma was just $10,924 in 1986.

Parents as Participants in the Educational Process

Contrary to a common misconception, low-income parents in Kentucky often speak up when their children experience problems in school. They call teachers, counselors, principals, and even school board members to make sure their children are treated fairly in school.

"I fight for my children," said a woman from Clay County, who believes her child's elementary teacher was incapable of teaching effectively, due to a hearing loss.

A woman from Johnson County went further. "I'm not a

fighter," she said, "but I will kill for my kids!"

The Johnson County mother was exaggerating, but she is angry that her daughter has been "more or less tagged" by teachers since the family's move to public housing. The girl made a "very high score on her KEST [Kentucky Essential Skills Test] and she made straight A's and she totally qualified for the 'Talented Development' program in her school but her teacher wouldn't recommend her." Her mother believes that the girl's address accounted for the teacher's initial rejection of her daughter. After the mother spoke with the teacher, the decision was reversed.

Parents play a more structured role in some schools, such as the Tyner Elementary School in Jackson County. Though funds were available, no speech pathologist could be found to work in the Jackson County schools. The parents stepped in.

"We don't want any excuses," said Judy Martin of the Appalachian Communities for Children, though she recognizes that finding a speech pathologist may be nearly impossible. "Instead, let's look at it a different way and find an answer."

A group of parents were the answer. They were trained to provide paraprofessional tutoring for children with speech problems through the "Parents Are Partners Training Program." Both the Superintendent of the Jackson County School System and the Tyner Elementary School principal are pleased with the cooperative efforts.

Parents also participate in local schools in another program in several locations in the state. These parents, however, are participating as students in an award-winning program called Parent and Child

A Berea College student from Floyd County with a two-year-old neighbor.

Education or PACE. PACE provides literacy classes to parents while their children attend preschool. Two employees of the Kentucky Department of Education designed the program and Roger Noe, a college professor and legislator from Harlan County, shepherded it through the Kentucky General Assembly. How Free Are the Public Schools?

If parents are so involved in the schools and so determined that their children will finish high school, why do more than three out of ten high school freshman in Kentucky fail to graduate with their class four years later? Why is Kentucky's literacy rate the very lowest in the nation?

What I learned last summer suggests that there are both economic and social reasons that undermine parents' hopes and dreams for their children. "Children can be cruel to other children," said a woman I spoke with at the Big Sandy Family Abuse Center in Prestonsburg. That cruelty directed at a child who is known to be poor can push him or her out the schoolhouse door.

Seventh grade seemed to be a "magic cutoff" for many clients of William B. Mains of Northeast Kentucky Legal Services in Morehead. School fees must be paid each semester in his county, beginning in seventh grade. He attributes the high number of clients who quit school in seventh grade to the assessment of fees beginning that year. In some districts fees are even charged in elementary school and kindergarten.

"I want to talk about monthly periods. I hope this is all right. You take the girls in my area right now. They do not have pads and they have to wear rags to school. They're afraid they'll show through their pants. They're afraid they'll mess their pants. They miss a week of school a month. Young girls are impressionable at that age. They're afraid that other kids will see the rags."

After Emma Washington of Bath County shared that comment with me, Kentucky Youth Advocates wrote letters to seven manufacturers of sanitary products requesting that samples or seconds be donated to the Christian Social Service Center for use by school-age girls who might otherwise not attend classes during menstruation. One company responded generously. Several companies wrote letters declining to help. The rest simply did not reply.

Inability to pay a fee nullifies the obligation to pay. Many districts permit parents to pay in installments. However, no one wants to be branded as "poor." Too often, school practices make it easy for children to identify classmates who do not pay tuition or book fees. For example, the entire class may watch as a homeroom teacher collects fees.

A Free Program That Has Backfired

The administration of the 1986 law entitling low-income high school students to free textbooks surely has not met the goals of its sponsors. Ironically, it has meant some children are going hungry at lunchtime and their parents are doing without essentials so that they can buy the "free" books.

Under the 1986 law, any child who is eligible for a free or reduced lunch through the federal school lunch program automatically qualifies for free textbooks. Rather than be identified as a "welfare brat," however, as Alice Jones of Rowan County put it, her daughters go without lunch. To escape being labeled "poor," they tell their classmates that they do not like the cafeteria food. Once free of the label, of course, they must find the money to buy their books.

In smaller schools, where most students are low-income, shame does not seem to go hand-in-hand with entitlement to free lunches or books. Darla Holder, a middle school student in Christian County, does not mind participating in the free lunch program. "A lot of her friends are on it, too, and they have two parents," explained her mother, who is separated from a husband "who has a problem with alcohol."

While I did not interview any Carroll County families, I wonder if students there are embarrassed by a new school policy. As students

finish walking through the school cafeteria line, they must show an identification card which shows whether their lunch is free, discounted, or full priced.

Regardless of their child's eligibility for free textbooks or lunch, all parents of kindergarten students at a Floyd County school must send a snack to school once a month for the 29 children in the room because "the school can't afford it."

One mother employed as a child care worker said it costs her about $7 to buy the snacks. In other words, given her wage of $3.35 per hour, she works more than two hours a month simply to buy a snack for the children in her son's kindergarten class.

Wheelwright High School in Floyd County, Kentucky.

Non-Educational Costs Are a Factor, Too

Some costs associated with attending school are not strictly educational but nonetheless keep children at home. Having enough appropriate clothes and shoes is an obvious example. Low-income girls in Bath County, and no doubt other counties as well, miss school for lack of disposable sanitary products. The cost of shampoo to rid hair of lice is another deterrent. Low-income families are forced to delay sending their children back to school until they can squeeze the cost out of already overburdened budgets. In a few areas, the Parent-Teacher Association and local school boards has helped families buy the shampoo. The state does not provide lice shampoo to health departments, which can cost $50 to $60 for a family of four.

The Impact of Corporal Punishment

The use of corporal punishment also has a negative impact on the self-esteem of students from all economic backgrounds. One Upward Bound student recalled with a mixture of bitterness and anger having "T-A-R-D-Y spelled on our behind." Late students at her school received a lick for each letter of the word "tardy."

In only ten states is corporal punishment administered to a higher percentage of students than in Kentucky. During the 1985-85 school year, some 30,076 Kentucky students were paddled. The Cabinet for Human Resources reported 160 instances of substantiated child abuse by Kentucky school personnel in 1986.

"It's not just these big major things either. My children contacted lice in school. That's a big problem every year. It takes $72 to buy the [lice shampoo] to wash my children's hair. I do that and they say, 'Well, we'll let them back in school' and a week later they'll come home with lice again. For people like me, I can't afford to do that.

"And that child is not let back in the school system until you have used the medication and it has been checked by a doctor or a health department official to prove that they don't have the lice anymore. Then you go through all that and strip all your beds and do all this good stuff and then you take them back to school and they send a little note home, 'This child has lice. This child has nits.'

"And you have to get that paper signed before they'll let them back in school and it's pretty hard for a parent like me who has a child come in on Monday evening with that little note and know that I'm going to have to buy $72 of medication. I'm going to have to keep that child home a whole week until Friday night 'til I get a check to go Saturday morning to buy the medication."

Patty Taggart
Jackson County
June 6, 1988

"The Path to a Larger Life"

We agree with Justice Thurgood Marshall who wrote last June, "For the poor, education is often the only route by which to become full participants in our society. In allowing a state to burden access of poor persons to an education, the court denies equal opportunity and discourages hope." To equalize opportunity and avoid discouraging hope, we recommend the following changes:

- Kentucky should provide free textbooks to all students. Until such a policy is adopted, the Kentucky Department of Education should mandate the use of procedures designed to insure the anonymity of eligible students. The branding of students as poor may cause them to feel outside the educational mainstream and even to drop out of school.

- Kentucky should prohibit public schools from charging "tuition fees," "laboratory fees," or fees of any type that are required to attend classes of one's choosing. Inability to pay may cause students to take only free classes or to drop out of school altogether.

- Kentucky should prohibit public schools from requiring that parents purchase snacks, tissues or other items for students' use. Money required so that a family can pay for food, shelter, or clothing may instead be spent on items that the school should purchase.

- Schools of education and the Kentucky Department of Education should provide instructional materials to teachers which describe effective disciplinary methods to use instead of corporal punishment. Physical disciplinary techniques can lower students' self-esteem and influence negatively their school experience.

- The Parents Are Partners Training Program should be used as a model to recruit and train volunteers to perform

tasks on a paraprofessional level to help students succeed in school. The use of paraprofessionals may make available a service or program that students would otherwise miss. However, such efforts should not substitute indefinitely for services and programs to which children are entitled.

- The Kentucky Department of Education and the Cabinet for Human Resources should work jointly to develop a method of supplying low-income students with feminine hygiene supplies and lice shampoo. Parents' inability to purchase these items sometimes results in their children staying home from school.

Alice Jones' Story

"Let me tell you something that will twist your heart," began Alice Jones as we discussed the special problems that low-income children experience in public schools. Alice supports herself and her two daughters with her $542 monthly disability check.

"My fourteen-year-old, she's been a straight A student all except in the wintertime. When things get hard, she will actually fail a test so she won't get on honor roll because I ain't got the $5 for her to go to Pizza Hut."

"Pizza Hut?" I asked puzzled. It seems Alice's daughter attends a Rowan County school that rewards honor students by taking them out for pizza. The only catch is the students must pay their own way.

"It's a reward," Alice said, "but you don't have the money to give them the reward. They claim they've got money for that [to pay for low-income students] but you've got to go before all the kids in the class and ask for it. And then the teacher sends you to the principal. I have seen the time that Ginger [Alice's fourteen-year-old daughter] stayed home. She just missed a day of school because of it. She's made six C's in eight years."

Even in the spring and fall, when utility bills are lower, the cost of the pizza reward is a strain on the Jones' household budget. Alice overheard a conversation between her daughters a year ago that let her know how well they understood the strain. The girls, then twelve and thirteen, agreed that only one of them would make high grades.

"I'll tell you what Ginger done the first six weeks of school," Alice said, recounting the overheard conversation. "Jennifer got on honor roll. So Ginger made two F's on two tests 'cause I couldn't afford for both of them to go."

"People think that poor people are so stupid. If they just knew how smart in life a poor person was!" commented Alice's friend, Emma Washington. Emma, along with Sister Kathleen Mulchrone from the Christian Social Service Center in Bath County, also took part in our conversation. Alice Jones serves as vice chair of the Christian Social Service Center.

> "The law states your kids have to go to school but education is not free. You have to pay $5 every semester for school supplies. In high school, it costs more."
>
> *Alice Jones*
> *Rowan County*
> *August 3, 1988*

Besides the money for Pizza Hut, Alice must pay fees for her girls to attend public school. "The law states your kids have to go to school, but education is not free," Alice explained. "You have to pay $5 every semester for school supplies. In high school, it costs more because of lab fees."

Alice Jones of Rowan County, whose two school-age daughters collaborate so that only one makes the honor roll. Ms. Jones cannot afford to pay $5 for both girls to go to Pizza Hut with other honorees.

Sister Kathleen recalled that a colleague, Sister Theresa, now deceased, had been shocked at the number of area students who dropped out of school for financial reasons. "That's where she got the idea to help with good clothes and good shoes for back-to-school." Sister Kathleen credits the Center's back-to- school clothing project with an increased number of high school graduates in the area.

In addition to its clothes closet, the Christian Social Service Center provides holiday food baskets and many other services to low-income families in Rowan, Bath, Fleming, Menifee, and Elliott Counties. The Center understands the limitations on the use of federal food stamps. Last year, in addition to a holiday meal, the Center provided toiletries, sanitary supplies, toothpaste, dish detergent, and laundry soap to hundreds of families. Food stamps cannot be used to purchase these necessities. The Center depends heavily on donations, like a load of food supplied by volunteers from Iowa the week I visited in August.

"You get so ashamed to ask for help," Alice said, "but the Christian Social Service Center, they don't make you ashamed to ask." Unfortunately there is no way the Center can help Alice's older daughter, Ginger, not feel ashamed when she is at school. Ginger refuses to sign up for the school's free lunch program.

"Ginger said she's not going to do it. They're making fun of kids that get free lunch. They go without lunch. If you get free lunch in high school, you automatically get free books. All right, but you've got a name on you. You're cheap."

Emma Washington agreed. "A lot of boys and girls, especially low-income people will actually do things to get expelled because they really don't have the money to go to school. When a kid gets a

> "Right now I just hope they'll get a good education, finish school, do what I didn't do. Without a good education, they're not going to be able to get good jobs. Soon they'll be on their own. I just want them to do the best that they can."
>
> *Anna Norton, a 32-year-old mother who left school after finishing sixth grade, Madison County June 7, 1988*

certain age, a lot of them has to start doing farm work because there's no other way for the family to make it."

Alice Jones does not miss the time when she received a grant from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. "You've got to go and bare your soul to the welfare office. If other people find out you draw welfare, honey," she told me, "you've got a welfare brat. They don't treat you like humans. Many eligible people don't apply. I had a friend that drawed food stamps for six months. She would come and get me and I would go get her groceries [because she was so ashamed]."

Alice's monthly disability check of $542 does not stretch as far as she would like, especially when there is an emergency. Due to a computer error one month, the food stamp office was misinformed about the amount of Alice's disability check. Her food stamps, normally worth $105, were cut back, and she "didn't have flour to stir up gravy. We were hungry all week. Lots of mornings we didn't eat breakfast.

"Poor people want to better themselves," Alice Jones told me, "but they ain't got a chance."

Lucinda White's Story

"What do you want for your grandchildren?" I asked Lucinda White last July.

"Gee, I'd like to see them go plumb straight through school if they could," she replied immediately. Lucinda White puts a high value on education though she had to drop out of school in the third grade.

"My mom was sick and I couldn't go to school much," she told me. "She was sick all the time."

Today, Lucinda does her best to be on hand when the school bus reaches the dirt road up the hill from her hollow. "They [her grandchildren] want me to walk them up to the school bus," she told me, "and I do."

"How many grandchildren and great- grandchildren do you have?" I asked Lucinda.

"Oh, I've got a lot," she answered smiling. "They stay around here a lot."

Although she is uneducated herself, her offspring and everyone else who meets Lucinda White are amazed by her accomplishments. She lives on two acres of land in Knott County originally owned by her grandfather. In the mid-1970's she used a hammer, a bow saw, an ax and $50 worth of used lumber to rebuild a fifty-year-old house on the land.

She wanted to raise the ceilings from 5'5" to 8 feet and to add three rooms. Since she could not afford to buy drywall, she framed

in the walls with cardboard boxes. Details and wonderful photographs of her incredible feat appear in Diane Koos Gentry's book, Enduring Women.

When I met Lucinda last summer, I told her how impressed I had been when I read about her efforts to rebuild the wood house her father had built five decades earlier.

"Well, I tell you how it is," she said. "If you got something to do like that and you got nobody else to do it, you got to do it yourself. That's about the way of it."

Some years after her rebuilding efforts, Lucinda's husband received a black lung compensation award of $12,000. The Whites immediately bought a used trailer "with a real bathroom," had a "good deep well drilled so we'd never run out of water again," and purchased a refrigerator, a washer, and dryer.

A flood later damaged their trailer though they continue to live in it. The trailer is the emotional, if not the geographic center, of an enclave of homes in a hollow on the Kelly Fork of Lotts Creek. A loving matriarch, Lucinda White watches over the lives of dozens of children, grandchildren, and great- grandchildren who live in the hollow with her. Lucinda has six children and "All six of them live right close," she informed me. She is very proud that one of her children attended the University of Kentucky. "My boy John went to school," she said.

Dotted along the edges of Lucinda's hollow are several unpainted wooden outbuildings and five other aging trailers which are home to many of Lucinda's descendants. She built one of the outbuildings herself and planted a garden on the slope behind it last spring. In spite of the drought and the heat last summer, she managed to grow cabbage, tomatoes, corn, and beans.

"I done all that myself," the 71- year-old great-grandmother told me, directing my attention to her garden. "I can everything," she

A member of Lucinda White's family outside Ms. White's trailer in Knott County, Kentucky.

explained, "'cause that's good eating. I'd rather have that than the stuff out of the store."

A creek runs along one side of the hollow. Because of the acid runoff from strip mining, its color is rust red. Nothing has lived in it for many years.

"By the end of the first week, she [the first grade teacher] had reached a point that either she spanked him or the principal did. By the next Friday, he was spanked again. I don't know how many Fridays this went on," explained Holly Bowers, who is on the staff of the Christian Appalachian Project's (CAP) Child Development Center in Berea, Kentucky.

"Do they only spank children on Friday in the public schools here?" I asked.

She laughed. "No, it's not that. By the end of the week, they just lose their patience."

Holly Bowers does not often laugh when she talks about corporal punishment. It is a form of discipline not used in the CAP Child Development Center. She is disturbed that the children she works with may be subjected to physical disciplinary methods when they leave CAP's preschool program and go on to public school.

One of Holly's colleagues, June Widman, put it this way: "To know at any time a child can be spanked for some obscure reason is very distressing."

"The mining just about destroyed this place," Lucinda told me, pushing a wisp of her white hair out of her deeply lined face.

The school that Lucinda's progeny attend is the last true settlement school in Kentucky, according to its director, Alice S. Whitaker. Named for the creek that runs alongside it, the Lotts Creek Community School has an excellent record and a rich history. Of the fourteen graduates of the school last spring, eight had plans to attend college, five to attend vocational school, and one to enter the military.

More remarkable than the 1987 graduation statistics from the Lotts Creek Community School is the number of college graduates who live beside the creek today. Last summer, Alice Whitaker drove along a ten-mile stretch of Lotts Creek, counting college graduates who were alumni of the school. She was able to name 42! Obviously, the school has had a profound effect on the community over a long period of time.

Founded in 1933 by Alice Whitaker's aunt, Alice H. Slone, Lotts Creek Community School relies heavily on contributions and utilizes the volunteer labor of church and college groups to maintain and improve the school.

Alice Slone began the school at the direction of Alice Geddes Lloyd. Alice Lloyd prepared Alice Sloné for her undertaking by sending her to college in Cleveland, Ohio. With the help of individuals like Alice Slone, Alice Lloyd oversaw the establishment of more than 100 schools in Eastern Kentucky.

Now 84 years old, Alice Slone serves as president of the Lotts Creek Community School. She personally dispenses the diplomas at graduation ceremonies. She is a delightful, witty, and caring woman

whose personality no doubt has contributed heavily to the school's success during the past 55 years.

Although Lotts Creek Community School was founded too late to provide Lucinda White the opportunity for a high school education, Lucinda is determined that others in her family will reach that goal and beyond. What Lucinda said about her carpentry work is true about education as well: "You got to do it yourself." Nonetheless, Lucinda's gentle guidance of her offspring will surely make it easier for them to fulfill her dream that they become educated.

The David School and Some Thoughts From Two Eastern Kentucky Teens

The David School is a dozen miles south and west of Prestonsburg, in Floyd County, Kentucky. From the Mountain Parkway out of Prestonsburg, turn left onto Route 404. This part of the parkway has only two lanes and they are divided by double yellow lines. Most of the trip to David, Kentucky, population 700 or so, is on Route 404.

Truly a country road, Route 404 winds back and forth, up and down, past many small farms. Blue jeans, underwear, and aprons hang drying in the sun. Chickens run about pecking at the dusty ground. Small herds of cattle graze on the brown grass. Twenty minutes down the road is a country restaurant that seems to be exactly the width of three trailers. Then come two sets of railroad tracks, a coal tipple and, finally, 100 yards ahead on the left, a two-story gray frame building with four white columns. It is the David School.

The David School is an alternative school, the first in Eastern Kentucky to be accredited by the state Department of Education. Started fourteen years ago, its purpose is simply to keep students in school until graduation. It seems to be doing a good job. More than 500 former dropouts have graduated from the David School.

The David School in Floyd County, Kentucky, opened in 1974 with ten students and four volunteer staff members. The accredited alternative school served 87 students last year, 57 of whom completed either eighth or twelfth grad while there.

There are three criteria for admission to the David School: the student must have dropped out of public school, must desire to come to the David School, and must be from a low-income family. The school awards both diplomas and General Educational Development certificates (GEDs). Most students come from Floyd, Johnson, Knott and Magoffin Counties.

No more than 65 students can be enrolled at any one time and there were more than 80 students on the waiting list when I visited last July. Many entering students, 60 percent of whom are male, are unable to read at the time of admission. The school boasts a strong vocational component in addition to the academic program. All students work.

The May 1988 graduating class of 31 included 10 eighth grade graduates and 21 high school graduates. Of the latter group, 17 went on to post-vocational training, college, or the military. It is a record of which Daniel J. Greene, founder and director of the school, is proud. Originally from Brooklyn, Dan considers the mountains of Eastern Kentucky his home today. He and his wife, who also is from the East, own a robin's-egg blue frame house not far from the school.

Dan arranged for two young men to take a break from their work project last July to talk with me at the kitchen table in his home. Warren Packard, 18, was one of the school's May graduates. He had plans to go to vocational school and study carpentry and home maintenance. Eric Combs, 17, was attending summer classes at the David School and expected to graduate in December of 1988.

"If you've got plenty of money, if you're really wealthy around here, you'll do okay," Warren told me.

> "There's no money for anything. School just started and she [her eleven- year-old daughter] wants to join the band, but I can't afford it." said Judy Holder, who is separated from a husband who "has a problem with alcohol." She is trying to support herself and two daughters on the $300 her husband pays in child support each month.
>
> "What's it cost?" I asked.
>
> "It's $42 for the instrument [a flute]," she answered, "and I'll have to buy a uniform and a book. I'm going to call and ask them if I can pay $5 a month. Her daddy don't pay anything."
>
> *Judy Holder*
> *Christian County*
> *September 14, 1988*

"When you played football, they treated you all right," Eric added. Both young men seemed eager to explain what they saw as a sort of class system that they believe dominates public education in Floyd County, at least at the high school level.

Both Warren and Eric felt unimportant and unwanted in school. "The teachers did not care if you was there or not," Eric told me. "Students were afraid to ask questions. It was more like a prison than a high school." After a three-day suspension for talking in class, Eric dropped out.

Eric likes the David School. "Up here at the school, the teachers — they're more like a family," he said. "The teachers ain't bosses, they know they're here to help."

"If you do something wrong, they don't jump down your throat," Warren said, agreeing. "And it's not the whole class that knows about it."

Both youth came from large schools where "every desk was loaded." It is their recollection that there were more than 30 students, and occasionally more than 40, in some of their classes.

Both shared stories of incidents that almost turned to violence involving school personnel. Eric told me that his civics teacher once challenged a group of students by saying, "Anybody that thinks they're bad enough and wants to fight me, just step outside!" He also observed his principal strike a busdriver.

"I finished school and everything. That's what my mom wanted me to do. When we took her to the nursing home, I talked to my principal and said I might be having to stay at home to help with my mom. My mom [who was dying of cancer] said, 'Are you going to graduate?'

"I seen the tears in her eyes and everything and I said, 'Yes, mama, I am.'

"She died two weeks and one day after my birthday — just before I got pregnant. [My three-year-old daughter] looks just like my mom. I hope she gets her education and goes to college and makes something of herself."

Andrea Gray
McCracken County
September 14, 1988

A teacher once erroneously accused Warren of throwing wads of paper while the teacher's back was turned. According to Warren, the teacher took off his glasses, and taunted him by saying, "Hit me! Hit me!" Warren did not hit his teacher, but the incident further dampened any enthusiasm Warren might have had for school.

When I asked them about their plans for the future, the young men talked excitedly for a few minutes about a construction job that a former supervisor had offered them. "It would pay $25,000 to $30,000 a year," they told me, but would mean interrupting their education and leaving Kentucky. "I'd like to stay here," Eric admitted.

"To be down here is all right," Warren agreed, "but the jobs, all of them, is $3.35 an hour."

Regardless of what jobs Eric Combs and Warren Packard find when they complete their education, there seems little doubt that they will be better jobs than would have come their way had it not been for the David School.

Marilyn Buchanan's Story

"Together, my husband and I make $7 an hour," Marilyn Buchanan told me, as I leaned on the pass-through counter between the kitchen and the main room at Cleda's Day Care Center in Prestonsburg.

"He washes cars. He's been doing it four years," she said. "He makes $3.65 an hour and I make $3.35." Marilyn is a kitchen worker at the childcare center. One of the first things she mentioned as we began chatting was that she and her husband had quit smoking a week earlier.

"Are you going to treat yourself with the money you're saving?" I asked.

"No," Marilyn replied. "We had to pay $60 for ice this week because our refrigerator broke. We've got four kids and we drink a lot of milk. We finally found a used one [refrigerator] for $125."

Andrea Buchanan, age two, and her sister, Sally, age four, at Cleda's Day Care Center, in Floyd County, Kentucky.

With a joint income of $14,560 per year, the Buchanans find it difficult to make ends meet with children who are aged eight, five, four, and two. The older two children, Bill and Luke, qualify for the free lunch program at school when they are in second grade and kindergarten respectively. The younger two, both girls, attend Cleda's Day Care where their mother is employed.

Bill's school fee is $12.50 this year and Luke's is $6.50. "Parents send snacks once a month for the kindergarten because the school can't afford it," Marilyn told me. It costs her about $7 to supply snacks for the 29 children in her son's room.

The Buchanans are very involved in their children's education. Bill, their eight-year-old, failed first grade and "barely made it" the second time. After Marilyn and Ed recently learned that Bill was dyslexic, they finally understood his lack of success.

Marilyn is eager to participate in a program that trains parents to work with children who have learning disabilities. However, she is not sure she and her husband can afford the $80 fee for the class.

"The Hindman Settlement School finally diagnosed the dyslexia," Marilyn told me. "We had to wait three months for an appointment. We want to get Luke tested too, but we still owe $35 on Bill."

Luke has a short attention span and failed kindergarten last year due to immaturity. Marilyn asked that he be placed in a remediation class but was told his skill level was too high. His situation and the family's schedule is complicated by the fact that Luke attends kindergarten two days one week and three days the next.

"I'd like him to go five days," Marilyn said, "but it's not up to me."

Marilyn wants her children to get the best education possible. She hopes their experience with public education will be different from hers. "I hated school," she said. "I got a part-time job at night so I could buy school clothes. There were seven kids in the family. The principal, he's not there now, said, 'If you work, you'll have to quit school.'"

Marilyn accepted her principal's ultimatum in tenth grade. However, now 27, she recently "scored very high" on her GED examination. "Cleda pushed us into getting that," she said. Indeed, a sign is posted at Cleda's Day Care promoting GED classes.

Cleda Lawson is the kind of person who would encourage her staff. She also takes a great deal of interest in the parents of the children at her center. After more than 20 years in the business, second generations of children she has served attend her center. All "her children" remain dear to Cleda. "I've been able to keep tabs on my children all these years," she said, sharing several success stories of children who had been at her center.

> "Education is the single most important thing that could help in the lives of the young people."
>
> *Charles M. Masner, Directing Attorney, Appalachian Research and Defense Fund of Kentucky, Inc., Prestonsburg, July 13, 1988.*

"People come in here and say 'It just feels different in here,'" Cleda continued. "I say, 'Honey, that's love. The kids and staff, we just respect and love each other.'"

That mutual respect and caring between Marilyn Buchanan and Cleda Lawson no doubt will go a long way toward helping the Buchanans resolve the concerns they have about the experiences of their two sons in public school.

Janet Scott's Story

"It's about got to the point where I can talk about it," Janet Scott told me quietly. "He's got to where he can talk about it now," she continued, referring to her sixteen-year-old son, Jeffrey. "He's doing a lot better.

"For two years, he didn't do anything. I knew there was something wrong, but the teacher at the elementary, they didn't know what was wrong. They couldn't deal with it. He just went the opposite of himself. He became a clown. He couldn't keep up with the children.

"He got expelled from school. He then had a home teacher and it just didn't work out. I went back to Lexington and had a lady to come to teach the teacher how to deal with it."

In another era, Jeffrey Scott might not have returned to school at all after the accident which injured him both physically and mentally in June of 1985. Today, federal laws require the provision of a "free appropriate public education" to all handicapped children. Not all school personnel are trained to meet the needs of students like Jeffrey, however.

> "My daughter won't even go eat [the free] lunch. She's peer pressured right now. She's right in between. That's charity. She won't eat breakfast unless I give it to her at home."
>
> *Becky Sue Brown*
> *McCracken County*
> *September 14, 1988*

Their task may be all the more difficult when their memory is of a child like Jeffrey, who was bright, outgoing, and very athletic prior to becoming disabled. Janet Scott knows she is fortunate that the Cardinal Hill Medical Center in Lexington responded when she asked that they send a consultant to train teachers in her home community in Todd County to work more effectively with Jeffrey.

"It was one of those pump BB guns," Janet told me as we talked in Madisonville at the Western Kentucky Legal Services office in September. Her voice quavered at times, giving me a hint of the fear and hurt she must have experienced during the last three years. "It went into his skull and into his brain. He's paralyzed on his left side. He has a brace on his leg. He can walk, but he has the brace."

Jeffrey was thirteen when his and a friend's innocent play changed the course of his life. "One of the doctors, he was a training doctor," Janet Scott continued, "he signed the wrong form." As a result, Jeffrey did not receive monthly Social Security Income (SSI) disability payments.

The judge noticed the error in forms at the hearing to determine whether Jeffrey was entitled to disability payments. As a result of the judge's observation, finally — three years after the accident — Jeffrey was awarded SSI.

"As soon as I got the SSI, they cut me off [from benefits under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children], but they did give me a Medicaid card," Janet stated. Without the card, Janet could not have afforded the special medical care her son needs.

Fortunately, Janet also was eligible for a Medicaid card prior to the time Jeffrey's SSI award was made. As a recipient of benefits under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, a Medicaid card was automatically issued for Jeffrey. "It really did good on some things," Janet told me gratefully.

"It covered the braces and his shoes. Most of it, it covered. When he had the Dilantin test, I had to pay for that. It was $168. At the time, I had $170 a month [from the AFDC grant]."

> "The kindergarten tuition is $5 and I have to send a box of kleenex. It's $10 for my 12-year-old. I send it fifty cents, a dollar at a time. I couldn't pay it any other way, not at once. If I don't have advance knowledge of something, if it's sprung on me that week, I can't do it. Luckily I won't be on welfare by the time she hits where I have to buy her books in high school. I couldn't do it. That's another reason I had to do something."
>
> *Becky Sue Brown, McCracken County mother*
> *who started nursing school last summer,*
> *September 14, 1988.*

Mary Carter of Daviess County tried to plan ahead for Stanley's first year of school. She knew she would have to spend part of her AFDC check for school supplies and she attempted to find out from school personnel exactly what he would need.

The AFDC check arrived at the first of the month but at pre-registration on August 9th, no one could tell her what her son would need for kindergarten. "They told me when I registered him [on the 23rd], I'd be able to find out what I needed for him."

On the 10th and 11th, Mary bought scissors, crayons, paste, glue, and paper. "I was afraid by the 23rd, I wouldn't have the money," she said. "When I went on the 23rd, they told me I would need $15. The school furnishes everything."

In addition to having to find an extra $15 the fourth week of the month, she also was asked to bring a box of tissues.

"How did you pay it?" I asked in amazement.

"I didn't, but I will pay," she replied in a determined tone. "They did the test twice. Jeffrey had seizures when he was little. He's off it [Dilantin] now and they'll see how he's going to do without it."

Education is very important to Janet Scott. Her son wants to finish high school and Janet has the same goal for him. She knows it will not be easy, especially because of the time lost when his teachers seemed unable to design a course of study appropriate to his needs.

"I had asked them all the time, could they put him in a slower class," she told me, "because we found out that Jeffrey's mind was limited. He would go so far and then it would just stop. He couldn't learn any more. It was his attention span, he couldn't keep up [when he was placed with his regular class].

"He had five or six classes a day. With one book, he'd come home at night and it would take us from 7 until 11 p.m. at night and he still wouldn't understand it," she said, describing how she worked side-by-side with her son to complete his homework each night.

"He failed seventh grade twice. In eighth grade, he done a little better. They finally put him in a slower class. There was only two or three in his class, and he did a lot better. He's in ninth grade this year. He's like a regular teenager," Janet said.

Janet is very pleased that personnel at the high school Jeffrey has just begun to attend are working so cooperatively with her. "Jeffrey gets tired a lot," she explained. In the past, he has fallen asleep in classes and needed to nap upon his return from school in the afternoon.

"The high school will try to see if he can stay all day. They're going to give him a rest period." If Jeffrey cannot manage to remain at school all day, Janet is not sure how she will arrange to pick him up early. She has just gotten a driver's license but has no car.

Janet's sister had driven her to the Western Kentucky Legal Services office in Madisonville to meet with me. Besides her sister and father, Janet has had help with Jeffrey from her grandmother and her two older children.

> "What do you want for your kids?" I asked.
>
> "Finish school, get a diploma, get a job, go to college," the young mother replied instantly. "Right now I want Pat to go to daycare," she continued, focusing back on the present.
>
> *Sandra Allen, 22-year-old*
> *mother Fayette County*
> *August 2, 1988*

Janet's family also offered their aid when Jeffrey went through a particularly trying time emotionally. "You just don't understand what I'm going through," Jeffrey used to say.

As Janet put it, "He found out for himself that he was not the old Jeffrey."

During the period of time when Jeffrey recognized and began to adjust to the changes in his life, "He got to where he would do things at night. I had to hide all the matches. I had to keep a watch on him. I'd be scared that he might do something, the way his mind was. We kind of took turns watching him. He's not doing it now," Janet told me in a relieved tone.

Part of Jeffrey's emotional recovery can be credited to a church he attends. "He loves church," his mother said. "He'll spend the whole day. He's well liked by the people."

Jeffrey continues to need physical therapy, which he receives in Russellville, sixteen miles from his home. He has periodic checkups in Lexington, though their frequency has been decreased by his doctors.

When she feels overwhelmed, Janet remembers that "the doctor didn't think he was going to live." She is thankful to have her son and proud of him. Though she "is not much of a talker," advocating for his rights at school was as natural an act to Janet Scott as loving her son.

"It was rough," she said, referring to the past three years. "It was very rough. You have to have patience and understanding." Janet Scott seems to have both, as well as a determination to help her son achieve as much as he possibly can.

The Story of Patty Taggart and Eight Other Women From Jackson and Rockcastle Counties

"I had five children by the time I was 21 years old," Patty Taggart said by way of introduction. She was one of nine women in a group who gather regularly at the Appalachian Communities for Children's Whispering Pines Community Center. All the women are mothers and all share a desire to improve the quality of their children's lives.

The center, perched on a clearing partway up a hill, is about an hour south of Berea in Jackson County, Kentucky. I was late arriving, not being familiar with the area and having been caught for many miles behind a slow-moving truck on the winding country road. However, we quickly made up for lost time conversing about subjects that ranged from the need for a family recreation center in the area to the plight of child sexual abuse victims. Comments of the group

Three parents outside the Appalachian Communities for Children's Whispering Pines Community Center in Jackson County. They meet regularly with other parents from Jackson and Clay Counties to discuss shared problems and possible remedies.

about health issues are incorporated into the opening section of Chapter 2 in this report.

My meeting at the Center had been arranged by Judy Martin from Appalachian Communities for Children. Judy had questioned me closely about my purposes and methods before agreeing to let me meet with the women's group. She wanted to be sure, I think, that I was aware of the strengths and capabilities of parents in Jackson and Rockcastle Counties. She need not have worried; these qualities were readily apparent.

Patty Taggart and the eight other women in the discussion group were obviously strong and obviously capable. They shared a determination, a cooperative spirit, and a willingness to look for creative solutions to problems children and families in their area face. Many problems center around the schools that their children attend. The schools have too few counselors and other positions, like that of speech pathologist, go unfilled year after year.

Parent Volunteers in the Schools

One of Patty Taggart's five sons has an emotional problem which she would like to discuss with a school counselor. However, she told me that there is only one counselor to serve some six elementary schools with enrollments totaling over 1,000 students.

"I can't get him the counseling that he needs and I can't afford to pay a private counselor," she said in a frustrated tone.

Another woman in the group had been trying for two months to arrange an appointment with a counselor to discuss a problem her eleven-year-old son was having with two teachers. In response to these two mothers' comments and concern among several other group members, there was talk of finding someone to train parent volunteers to provide counseling in the schools on a paraprofessional level. A similar project, the Parents Are Partners Training Program in Jackson County has been quite successful in working with children with speech problems.

The Problem of Abuse

Another issue that concerned women in the group was that of child abuse, both physical and sexual. With no resources in the

community for abuse victims and too few counselors in the schools, women in the group believe that abuse is going unreported and untreated.

"When my son was in first grade," began one of the women, "he came home one day and told me, 'I've got a friend at school. His knees are bruised. One day, we were roughing it up and I accidentally raised his shirt. He had strap marks across his back and rear end.'

"He [Justin, age twelve] tries, then when the teacher says he does not try, it makes him feel like giving up completely. She'll write little notes like 'Justin doesn't try hard enough.'

"He says, 'Mama, I do try.'

"When it started, we went and talked to the teacher. I asked 'What should I do? Should I start out by punishing him? Taking away his cartoons or not letting him play or should I just tell him it's all right?'

"I've sat down and worked with him. I even told him I'd give him $5 for an A and $3 for a B. And he brought it up, but then he gave up on that. I don't really know what it is. He's in fifth and he should be in sixth."

Lisa Wheeler
Carter County
August 3, 1988

"Something had to be done," she continued, "and I started talking to people, but was labeled as 'nosy' and 'busybody'." The boy's father, whom the woman believed to be responsible for the abuse, no longer lives in the home but has visitation.

"He's better now," the woman said, "but that child is still walking around with bruises."

"We're talking about children who don't have anybody they can trust," said another woman, who believes parent volunteers could be trained to encourage children to report abuse and to work with victims.

Several group members were frustrated by their knowledge of an eleven-year-old who was four months pregnant. It is rumored that her stepfather impregnated her. Though reports had been made to appropriate officials, it was impossible to prove the stepfather was culpable "though he can get out in the community and brag about it."

"More child sexual abuse occurs than people would recognize or believe," Judy Martin contributed. "Further, there is not enough follow-up or real caring," she said. Patty Taggart remembers being traumatized by removal from her home and placement in a foster home as a result of sexual abuse she suffered at home. Her younger sisters were left in the home and later abused.

The group unanimously agreed with the current posture of the state on handling abuse cases. Today, the abuser, rather than the victim, is removed. "I was the one who suffered," Patty said. "I loved my mother dearly. I didn't want to leave. I don't think they should ever take the child out of the home unless it's absolutely a have-to case."

"Matthew sat in the back of class two years and was not taught nothing. I was working two jobs and paid $5 an hour for a tutor over summer. There were five or six children the teacher would not teach.

"That hurt to pay $5 an hour. I was working two jobs and my taxes were already paying that teacher once. And it was not right for me to have to pay it a second time.

"He was in second grade and didn't learn to read. The tutor worked with him for a month and he was reading everything in sight."

Floyd County mother
August 15, 1988

The Preventive Approach

An "ounce of prevention" is what Patty Taggart thinks is needed to help both those children who have problems in school and those who have problems at home. "Children need alternatives and choices," she said. "If the government would put as much money into keeping children out of trouble as putting them in jails and foster homes, it could help these children see that they are valuable."

"We're all in this for our children," said another woman as the discussion neared an end. Their regular meetings and many volunteer efforts on behalf of children in Jackson and Rockcastle Counties are ready evidence of her statement. Indeed, the women I met at the Whispering Pines Community Center last June are motivated by a deep caring and concern for their children.

Conversations with Dr. Bill Best and Eleven Upward Bound Students

"Schools essentially are designed to build failure for low-income students," pronounced Dr. Bill Best, who has directed the Upward Bound Program at Berea College since 1966. He believes today's large consolidated schools make for an impersonal educational experience and one unlikely to enhance a child's self-esteem.

These and other topics related to school reform were the focus of a conversation Bill Best and I had last June in Berea. While I was on campus, I also was able to meet eleven Upward Bound students from seven South Central Kentucky counties.

By definition, Upward Bound students come from low-income families or have parents who have not graduated from college. In addition, Upward Bound students must have the potential to succeed in college, though not necessarily an educational record that reflects their potential.

"This is the first year she's gone to school without any new clothes. So what I did, I cleaned an apartment and I made $20 and I bought her a pair of jeans and a pair of shoes so she did have new jeans and shoes to go to school with and it made a big difference. She didn't cry. I was the one that felt guilty."

Emily Williams
Christian County
September 14, 1988

Upward Bound is designed to enable low-income students to experience success. Intensive courses are offered in various subjects that will help prepare young people for college. Counseling and tutoring are provided. The most fascinating content in the students' six-week summer program at Berea, however, comes from the use of the "arts" — which Dr. Best defines quite broadly — as a vehicle for enhancing self-esteem. Aquatic art, swimming, dance, gardening, woodworking, arts and crafts, and photography are among the courses offered to foster ego-enhancement.

The fathers of several Upward Bound Students worked in coal mines, including one father who quit school at age ten to go into the mines after the boy's mother became seriously ill.

Bill Best's premise is logical: students will choose subjects that interest them, they will do well in such subjects, and ultimately will, with good reason, be proud of themselves and feel more confident. They also will, in the process, learn something about "how to think."

They then will take on new challenges with a stronger self-image and will again do well, in part because they will believe in themselves. In short, success will build on success. Of course, caring teachers who have themselves been well-educated fit into the formula, too. Dr. Best explains his educational philosophy in a thought-provoking essay included in his 1986 book, *The Great Appalachian Sperm Bank and Other Writings*, cited in the Bibliography.

None of the students I met articulated Bill Best's philosophy but all of them obviously were benefitting from it. They were genuinely excited about their learning experiences and felt good about their achievements in the summer program. They freely shared their impressions of their high schools "back home," and unanimously endorsed the Upward Bound experience as one of growth and personal accomplishment.

Students' Comments about School Personnel

Most of the eleven Upward Bound students were disappointed by their high school teachers. Their perception was that their teachers had little, if any, interest in them:

- "Most teachers don't care." (16-year-old boy)
- "Our teachers don't care if you get your homework." (16-year-old girl)

- "Some teachers don't care." (17-year-old girl)
- "Teachers just pass you to get you out of their face. One teacher told our class, 'I don't care if you pass or fail, it won't bother me!'" (15-year-old boy)
- "They put a wall between you and them." (17-year-old boy)
- "They expect a lot, but they won't give you anything." (14-year-old girl)
- "Most of the teachers give the assignment and leave the room." (15-year-old boy)
- "Kids drop out because their teachers don't get behind them." (17-year-old boy)

One student shared a story about a grading scheme that he found quite discouraging. A teacher at his school permits students to "give away" up to 10 points from their averages to friends who need the extra points. The friend must sign a contract promising to earn and return the 10 points. The young man who told me this story is a straight-A student. However, his grades have not been traded or borrowed or, as he put it, "I have to work for mine."

> "They pass them to just get rid of them."
>
> *Parent commenting on a school in Wheelwright, Kentucky, August 16, 1988*

> "The county doesn't give them anything for the schools," said one parent during a discussion about the schools in her part of Floyd County.
>
> "The Academic Boosters bought paint for the rooms, air conditioners for the rooms. They bought a computer for the business class, bought typewriters for them, all the stuff they needed for the home ec department. We're the last button on Gabriel's coattail," said another parent, in support of the first statement.

In spite of these negative comments, most Upward Bound students admired at least one of their former teachers. In some cases, the students gave credit to that special teacher or teachers for the fact that they had stayed in school and hoped to attend college. In other cases, students credited their parents. One ninth grader, whose father quit school to work in the coal mines at the age of ten, said his parents "always encouraged" him to stay in school.

The students' perceptions of their principals and counselors were similar to that of their teachers. "He puts discipline over education," said one young woman, describing her principal. A young black woman believes that the principal and the teachers in her school are prejudiced though the students are not. Another student, who thinks his principal does a good job, complained that his counselor only "tells you the obvious. 'You have to work.'"

Students' Experiences with Corporal Punishment

Several Upward Bound students talked with me about corporal punishment, the use of physical discipline to punish students who misbehave.

> "My son's grade school missed ten days on account of maintenance problems at the school. That was ten days those children had to make up for sewer, no water and no heat. Ten extra days for something that should have been corrected back in the summer.
>
> "My daughter will graduate on May 12 supposedly. I guarantee it will be the third or fourth of June before she receives her diploma and it has been that way the whole twelve years she has been in school. She has never been out on time."
>
> *Floyd County mother*
> *August 16, 1988*

"Last year I bet I got 100 licks from being tardy!" exclaimed a seventeen- year-old girl. She admitted that she often was late. On each such occasion, school personnel "spelled T-A-R-D-Y on our hind end," she told me, meaning she was struck on her buttocks five times for each offense.

In another school, "licks" are given for cursing and talking back. In a third, there is a teacher who gives "two swats for touching the walls." In about half of the school districts represented by my interviewees, suspensions and expulsions are used instead of corporal punishment. In one district, I was told, "The ones that get in trouble, he [the principal] thinks they're already lost and he lets them practically get away with murder."

The Clash Between Athletics and Academics

Several students were discouraged by what they perceived as too much emphasis on sports in their schools. One young man complained about the high price tag on lights that recently had been installed on the athletic field. He and several other students thought the academic budget should be higher, and the athletic one, lower.

A fourteen-year-old girl was disheartened that the only foreign language taught at her school was German. A fifteen-year-old boy named Byron said, "I'd like to take Latin." His school does not offer calculus either and has only three Advanced Program classes. Since four Advanced Program classes are a prerequisite for a scholarship to a state college, Byron cannot hope to qualify.

Ironically, Byron has a perfect 4.0 average. Presumably his teachers think he is a top student. Byron doubts it, but not because he has a low self-image. "I know I'm smart," he admits hesitantly. "I'm not that smart though. The school is behind."

He was comparing his South Central Kentucky school to one he had attended the four years his family lived in Florida. "Teachers [in Florida] pushed their students and gave them a lot of encouragement," he told me. His Florida school had an academic team that was first in the state and fifth in the nation.

"They had pride in it," he said, referring to his school in Florida. There is an academic team at his school in Kentucky, but they "don't even have jackets," he said with dismay.

Byron's family moved back to Kentucky so that his father could receive medical care in Lexington. A coal miner for 26 years, his father is now partially paralyzed. Once "a strong man with big muscles weighing 220 pounds," Byron's father now weighs 150 pounds and "hurts all the time." Byron's mother must stay home to care for her husband. Byron is "pretty sure" he'll go to college, but only if he receives financial aid.

Byron hopes to become a doctor. He wants to help others, in part because of his father's experience. Another Upward Bound student, whose father died from a brain tumor at the age of 36, also hopes to be a doctor. A third young man wants to become a surgeon.

The other eight Upward Bound students I met plan on careers in journalism, teaching, nursing, architecture, and philosophy. It is far too soon to say when or even whether they will reach their goals. What seems important right now perhaps is the fact that these low-income and first- generation college-oriented youth have such high aspirations. And, last summer they indeed seemed to be "upward bound."

Jackson County, Kentucky, where, in 1980, only 25 percent of the adults 25 years of age or older had a high school diploma or equivalency. The county ranked 120th in the state in this measure. The percentage for 1990 should be higher, in part because of the efforts of community organizations like Appalachian Communities for Children.

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5 SUCCESS STORIES: THE GED AND BEYOND

Comments and Recommendations

Happy endings do exist, even in stories like those told earlier in this report. Many of them begin when a low- income parent enrolls in a General Educational Development (GED) program or in vocational school or college.

Acquisition of additional education not only insures better job opportunities, it also demonstrates the parent's belief in the importance of education.

"I don't want my kids to say, 'Well, mother, I'm going to quit school because you did,'" said a Madison County mother who is working on her GED. More than 15,000 Kentuckians received their GEDs last year, a number which, for the first time, exceeded the number of high school dropouts in the state.

In this introductory section, we mention programs in Lexington and Prestonsburg that provide various kinds of support to low-income parents who want post-high school training. However, numerous other programs, though usually on a lesser scale, also encourage low- income parents to pursue an education.

The One-Parent Family Facility

In Lexington, a unique program has been established to help AFDC recipients and other low-income parents meet their basic needs while they attend college. The One-Parent Family Facility has fifteen apartments in three renovated buildings not far from downtown. An on- site childcare center is located in one building. Rent and childcare costs are on a sliding-fee scale. Counseling and other support services are available on the site as well.

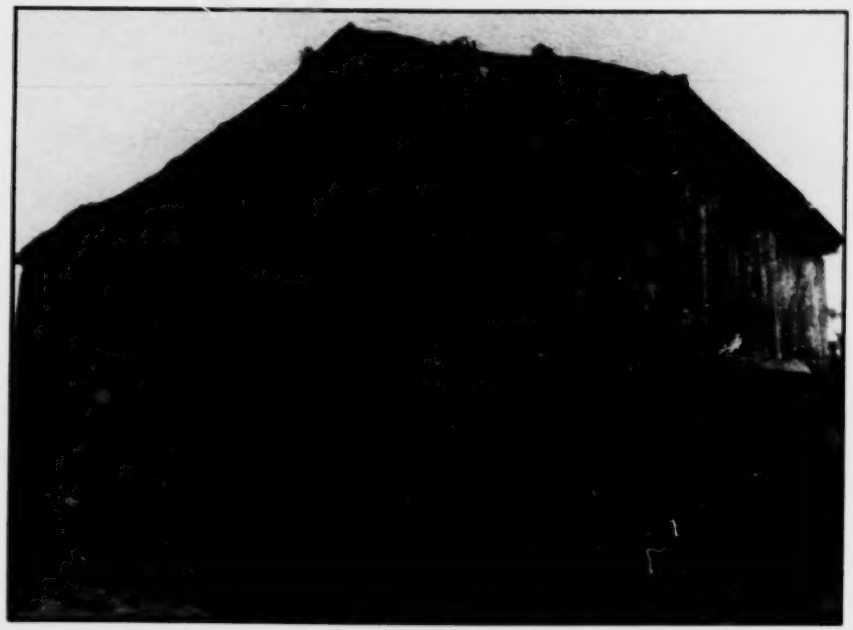
The program is a joint venture of the Kentucky Housing Corporation, the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, the University of Kentucky, the United States Housing and Urban Development's Project Self-Sufficiency, and United Way of Blue Grass.

"Ever since I've been over here, it seems like a chapter of my life has been closed and a new chapter open," said Amy Yessin-Weiler, who requested that her real name be used in this report.

"If more money was poured into training and education, there would be less poor people," Amy said. "We should make welfare a transitional thing."

Amy's route to poverty began with her husband's request for a divorce the same month Amy learned she was pregnant with their second child. After the baby was born, Amy found a job as a secretary at a local hotel. Two raises and one promotion later, she left her public housing apartment and moved into a private apartment, confident in her ability to support herself and her two young daughters. Suddenly, she lost her job and "had no money to pay bills. I just wasn't making it."

Joyce Harvey who works with the Christian Appalachian Project staff in Rockcastle County, Kentucky, says " 'Self-employed' means they plant, cut, and put tobacco for another person and chop wood in the winter." Without an education, other types of employment may not be available.



About that time Amy learned about the One-Parent Family Facility. She delayed applying because of her age. "I expected to go to school and see all these eighteen-year-old's running around and this old lady," she laughed as she envisioned herself in college.

Although at 28 Amy is older than many students, she now feels secure and good about what she is doing. She gives much of the credit to the unique program that has made it possible for her to attend school while she lives on $100 in weekly child support.

"I don't know if I could have done it without the support system. If you can target people that really want to try, then you're going to have less people on welfare. You're going to have more taxpaying dollars. It's going to really pay for itself, so you're not really going to be spending all this money. I feel like it's such a simple answer," she concluded.

I did not stay at Amy's apartment long. She had to put her daughters to bed shortly and then begin studying for a test to be given the next day. Nonetheless, her comments go to the heart of the question: What can the state do to help low-income parents become more independent?

The Single Parent/Homemaker Career Development Program

Seven low-income students made comments to me that were similar to those of Amy. The seven were enrolled in the Single Parent/Homemaker Career Development Program at Prestonsburg Community College in Floyd County, Kentucky. In Floyd County, 57 percent of the population over eighteen years of age do not have a high school education.

The Single Parent/Homemaker Career Development Program is a state-funded project that seeks to assist single parents and homemakers in becoming self- supporting members of the community. Single parents of either gender and homemakers without workforce experience are eligible. The orientation portion of the program provides 50 hours of training in job and educational skills, including computer literacy and personal finance. The seven women I met had completed orientation and were working for degrees in nursing and teaching.

Jean Rosenberg, the very enthusiastic director of the program, is proud of "her" students and rightfully so. They are a remarkable group. All have children whom they are raising alone. All live on a very low income. Most are recipients of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and food stamps. Each month, most have less than $400 to ration out for rent, utilities, most transportation, clothing, their children's school expenses, paper and soap products, and other items food stamps do not cover.

The state provides these and other AFDC recipients in school a monthly transportation allowance of $20 and childcare grants of up to $313 per month for two or more children. However, according to several recipients, the childcare grants are paid two months after they are incurred. Although childcare centers may be willing to accept late fees, private sitters often are not. "It's kind of hard," Betty Marshall said as she described her current schedule. "They're [her children] in school all day, you're in school all day. You come home, you have to make sure you take that special time for them. Then you have to study. Then there's the cooking and making sure they're taken care of which is first priority for me.

"I do not touch my books or anything until after I spend time with them," she continued. Betty has two children, Samuel who is seven and Gerald who is four. "I have a bedtime limit. I send my children to bed at a certain time every night. You have to if you want to get anything else done. So what time they're up and about, I spend that time with them."

It is for their children that all these women are enrolled in college classes. They want to provide more than a subsistence living for them and they want to serve as a model. But while they remain on welfare, they and their children sometimes suffer. They are poor, they know it, and it hurts.

"One of my girls is embarrassed to be on food stamps," Candy Douglas told me. "She don't want nobody to know because other kids make fun of her at school."

"People stereotype you," Betty Marshall said. "That's what is so bad. I hear people say all welfare mothers want to sit and have babies so they can get a bigger welfare check. When people hear you're on welfare, [they say] 'Oh, you're one of them. I wish I didn't have to work.'

"It's more work being on it," Betty continued. "You have to try going to the shopping center late at night to get your groceries. If I

Laura Yessin-Weiler, age three, at home in the One-Parent Family Facility in Fayette County, Kentucky.

see anybody I know, I always go to the farthest lane if there's somebody behind me.

"My children suffer, too," Betty added. "I have not bought my children any clothes in five years. My ex-husband doesn't even acknowledge that he has these two children. I worry. Plus I have no car. It's very hard to find transportation." Childcare is an important issue for the women with younger children. Sharon Singleton has one child, age four. "Mine's just starting Headstart," she told me. "It's given me a chance to go to school. Her bus comes at fifteen after seven and don't come back til fifteen after two. So it gives me time to take four classes. They provide lunch and breakfast, too."

All the women I spoke with had stories to relate about how the various helping systems serving them sometimes operate at cross purposes. Before she started college, Betty Marshall's income was so low that she received $230 in federal food stamps for herself and her two children each month. Her public housing apartment was rent free.

"Then when I decided to go to school [and received school grants], they made me pay rent. My food stamps went from $230 to $170." While it is true that her "income" has increased, she needs the extra money for school-related expenses.

"You try to get off welfare and you can't afford to go to school. It's like they want you to stay on welfare the rest of your life. Believe you me, if I could be anywhere else than welfare, I would."

In making our recommendations in this chapter, we have looked to the low-income parents themselves whose lives are "success stories" in the making. We believe, as they do, that education is a key element in any recipe for increased independence and for a break in poverty cycles.

Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Kentucky should publicize literacy, GED and post-high school training and should actively recruit low-income parents to enroll. As stated in the title of a recent book by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, education is "the path to a larger future." Kentucky should help its low-income citizens start down that path so that they may become more independent themselves while also setting a positive example for their children.

- Kentucky should provide incentives to encourage the establishment of quality childcare centers in areas where few exist. In such areas, the state should reimburse caretakers, including relatives in the home, while parents attend educational programs. Without liberal childcare policies, particularly in rural areas, many AFDC recipients will be unable to take advantage of educational opportunities.

- Kentucky should make prompt payments for childcare needed during a parents' attendance at school. Currently, most payments are two months in arrears. The delay in payment may force a parent to pay childcare providers with money they need for rent or other necessities.~

- The Cabinet for Human Resources should work cooperatively with other agencies to replicate the One-Parent Family Facility developed in Fayette County. The facility provides low cost housing and childcare as well as other support services at one site for low- income parents who are college students. With college training, better-paying jobs are available. The likelihood that a low-income parent will become independent is greatly increased.

Adele Lawrence's Story

"I'm going into computer science. When I get through college, I will have a bachelor's degree in computer science, a teaching degree in mathematics, and a minor in psychology." Adele Lawrence, age 38, has some pretty grand plans for a woman whose family had a gross income of $3,519 last year.

"We lived on the side of a mountain 40 miles from nowhere," she told me. "I've resorted to packing my water and lighting candles because I've lived without electricity," she said.

"There was one main food item in our house and that was brown pinto beans." The family received federal food stamps but, thanks to her husband, "most of the food stamps got sold for beer." Harder than eating beans and living without electricity were the many times the family lived "on a creek bank" in their station wagon.

For seven years, Adele moved from one shack to another and lived out of a car, all the while raising two little girls. She also endured seven years of abuse by her husband, a man she described as "too sorry to work." Seven years was enough and Adele finally left and moved to a shelter run by the Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) in Rockcastle County. There, she and her daughters, Janet, age five and Brittany, age six, have had a chance to live a different kind of life.

Their shelter is secure but Adele still fears that her husband will find her and the girls. In their final fight, the one that prompted Adele to leave, her husband literally threw her through a door. At first, I wondered if it were wise for Adele to describe such violence in hearing range of her daughters. Brittany and Janet were coloring quitely at a stone picnic table where Adele and I were talking in front of CAP's Mutual Care Home in Mount Vernon, Kentucky. However, Brittany interrupted my thoughts by saying. "Tell that part where he said 'someone is going to get hurt.'"

I quickly realized the girls were not hearing about the abuse for the first time. They had observed it and probably relived it in their minds over and again. In fact, Adele told me that, as she was beaten during that last terrible fight, she heard her five-year-old cry out in stark terror, "Daddy's trying to kill Mommy!"

After imagining the drama of that last encounter for a moment, I looked at the girls and asked, "Did he hurt you, too?"

"He whooped me more than he did Janet," Brittany, the older girl, replied matter-of-factly.

"We're not going to let it happen anymore, are we?" their mother asked promptly in a tone that seemed to envelop them in her love and protection.

"No," each girl answered quickly. "Do you know how old I am?" was their next question, and I realized that we were finished discussing the violence and ready for another topic. In retrospect, I think Adele was wise to allow her daughters and herself to talk about the brutality that was their way of life for so long. The violence will not diminish in the telling of it, but talking about it may ease the transition to another life.

In seven short months on her own, Adele has already managed to apply to, and be accepted by, Eastern Kentucky University. "I've been out of high school 21 years, but I got 18 points above the average high school level on my ACT," she told me proudly, referring to a college entrance examination. Adele and her daughters were scheduled to move to Richmond, where Eastern is located, about two weeks

after our June conversation. "When they move out, we'll have a big hug and cry," said Myrtle Smith, a Resident Assistant at the Christian Appalachian Project's Shelter in Mount Vernon, where Adele and her girls have been living.

Adele received one of two scholarships for this school year awarded by the Kentucky Research and Education Institute for Women. She also will receive an AFDC grant of $218 a month and food stamps. Her husband, who receives Social Security Income (SSI) because of head injuries, has never paid her child support.

"Since I left him in December, he sent me one $5 bill and three postage stamps. And that's the only thing he ever sent me!" she said. She planned to file for divorce as soon as she had met Kentucky's residency requirements. A job she held briefly out of state disqualified her from filing sooner.

"Poverty's just not my way of life," Adele said. She is very determined to succeed in college and to create a new life for herself and her daughters. At some point along the way, she wants to donate time back to the Christian Appalachian Project, the program that provided a safe haven and the emotional support she needed so desperately when she left her husband.

Gina Stokes' Story

"I want to get my GED for me, to make me feel good. I don't want my kids to say, 'Well, mother, I'm going to quit school because you did.'" Gina Stokes, who shared that statement with me last June, is a 23-year-old woman from Madison County. Neither of her children is old enough to attend school, but Gina believes it is crucial that she set an example for them.

"My husband and all his brothers quit school, too," she said with regret.

"I want them to feel good about education," she said. "I'm going to get mine, too. I'm going to make something of myself. I'm wanting to get my GED and I'm wanting to take college courses." Gina was well on her way to her goal the day we talked. She had plans to take the GED examination at the end of the month. A pre-test showed she was low on language and mathematics.

"I'm wanting to bring those up, but I made 65 on science, the highest you can make," she told me proudly. A tutor comes to her home once a week to help her prepare.

Gina Stokes with her sons, David, age 4, and Paul, age 17 months, of Madison County, Kentucky. Ms. Stokes dropped out of school after her sophomore year. "I'm wanting to get my GED and I'm wanting to take college courses," she said.

Gina is a bubbly, optimistic and talkative 23-year-old woman. I met her through Holly Bowers, who is on the staff of the Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) in Berea. Holly and I and my three-year-old son, Joshua, had driven to Gina's small frame home in the CAP van. Gina greeted us warmly and began talking excitedly immediately.

It was several minutes before I felt comfortable enough to interrupt Gina and ask if I could use my tape recorder and take notes. She readily assented and continued talking animatedly in the sunshine-filled front room. Holly, who works with preschoolers, soon had my son and Gina's four-year-old engaged in quiet play, allowing Gina and me to continue our conversation.

"I finished my sophomore year," she said, "and did two or three weeks in my junior year." She then married Bill Stokes. Their first child, David, arrived four years later and their second, Paul, 17 months ago.

"I didn't want to quit school, but when I got married, we moved up north. By the time we made it back, I'd done missed over one semester and part of another. Then we wound up in financial trouble." Bill and Gina lived outside Gina's former school district and they would have had to pay tuition to enroll there. In addition, the young couple had no car. Gina probably could have attended another school but she was convinced that her original school was the best in the county.

"That's where I want my kids to go," she said, referring to the school she attended for ten years. "I'm worried about what the future's going to hold for my kids," she admitted. She firmly believes education is the critical ingredient in their future success.

"I want them to know that when they grow up they can be anything or whatever they want to be. I want them to know the sky's the limit. I want them to be able to do whatever they feel that they want to do. I'm not going to be the one to tell them that they can't do it. I want them to try and if they succeed, fine. If they don't, if they change their mind, that's fine, too. I'll be right there for them," Gina told me, leaning forward for emphasis.

"I don't want them to feel like they're handicapped and that they can't do something," she said. "If they want to be the president of the United States, I'm right there behind them 100 percent. I'm not going to tell them, 'No, you can't be president of the United States. You'll never be able to that.' That's what I've said ever since I was pregnant with my first one and that's what I believe!"

Gina had already started a college fund for David, now four, when he needed surgery for a hernia. The $50 she had deposited in a savings account has now been paid to the doctor who operated on David. Gina has been told that David will need surgery again.

Gina does not plan to have additional children. In fact, she is hoping to have a tubal ligation. Six months ago, her husband "finally got a good job" in Lexington which provides health insurance benefits for the family.

"My kids are my life," Gina said. "If I had to do it all over again and I knew there wouldn't be a future for my children, I wouldn't have them. I wouldn't bring them into the world, knowing that they wouldn't have a good future and a decent life," she continued with conviction.

"I look at my kids and I see me in them," she said thoughtfully.

If Gina indeed is "in" David and Paul, they should have hearty doses of optimism and determination. And that good future and decent life that Gina Stokes believes in for them will come to pass.

Ruth Randall's Story

"We commuted, you might call it, from Florida to Michigan with the crops," Ruth Randell told me, as we sat talking in the kitchen of her Rockcastle County trailer on a muggy day last June. She was referring to the fourteen years and her husband travelled back and forth between the two states, picking fruit in Florida and apples in Michigan.

"Michigan," she told me, "treated you better than Florida. They had a garden that everyone could use and they took you to the food stamp office immediately. Florida was rough. There's a lot of kids get killed out in the fields in Florida."

As we talked, we occasionally had to strain to hear over the high-spirited laughter and shouting of Ruth's daughter and my son, who were playing together like longtime companions. They ran in and out of the trailer, practically sailing over the concrete-block steps at the open front door. Ashley, now five, is a Hispanic girl, whom Ruth and Ed adopted when they lived in Florida. She obviously was enjoying having a playmate close in age.

During the years that Ruth and Ed followed the crops from south to north and back again, the couple always hoped to come back to Kentucky. The travel and work were hard but they managed, "He never did get an education, so a hard day of work was all he knew," Ruth said describing her husband.

"You can make good money at field work because it's piece work. If you work hard, you make money. If you don't work hard, you don't make anything. We lived down there [in Florida] about fourteen years. We owned our own home and we bought another home on the side. We did good."

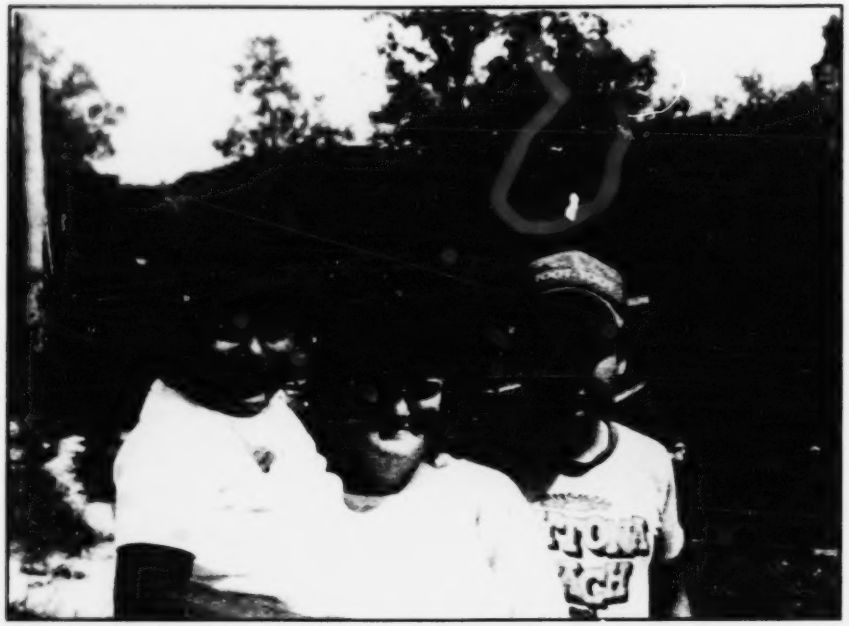
Still, the real estate in Florida was, in many ways, only a means to an end. "We didn't have a place to put out a garden. Everything we bought was out of a store and we both got tired of no country life because we both were raised right here. We just got tired of it and it got to where it cost more to live down there than what it was worth. So we decided to sell out and come back," Ruth explained.

Selling out and coming back was not quite as simple as the couple might have wished. They used the $6,500 profit from the sale of their real estate to buy 40 acres in Kentucky — and then continued north to Michigan to pick apples again. It took two more seasons of picking fruit in Florida and another season in Michigan before they had enough money to buy a used trailer at an auction. They had to raise the cash because "we had no credit and no job," Ruth said. The family has been back in Kentucky two years.

Ruth and Ed, who planned to work in Kentucky, soon discovered that they were not equipped to get decent jobs here. "Here an education matters," Ruth told me. "Down there, an education didn't matter." Before the couple had left Kentucky, Ed had done maintenance work at a small college in the community. When he applied there again, "he couldn't even get a job pushing a lawnmower."

Meanwhile, Ruth was finding living on the land wonderful in many ways, but exhausting, too. "I told [Ed], I said, 'Hey, I cannot do this backbreaking farmwork. I don't know if I'm too old or what, but I've got to find me something to do and I started hearing about this School on Wheels.'"

It was a poster at the food stamp office, and a radio advertisement that gave Ruth the information she needed to finish the education she had interrupted in the tenth grade. The School on Wheels provides tutors to work with adults who want to earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Once Ruth got started, it was only two months and 20 days before she passed the GED examination. "When I started my GED, my son was on a higher level of math than what I was," she told me, referring to Kenneth, her older child, now fifteen. "I'd ask him and he'd come in and help me," she said with pride in her voice.



Ruth Randall, with her children, Ashley, age 5, and Kenneth, age 15 on their Rockcastle County property. Ms. Randall was the first of her eight siblings to earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

Ruth was the first in her large family to earn the GED, though now a sister also has the degree. Three other sisters are working on it. Ruth gave her certificate to her mother. "Mom's hoping for nine [certificates]!" Ruth said laughing.

Ruth is in vocational school now, learning typing, shorthand, accounting, and how to use a computer. She had not planned to go beyond the GED, but a Christian Appalachian Project (CAP) worker encouraged her. CAP helped her apply for a federal grant which pays part of her tuition. She also receives gas money from the federal Job Training Partnership Act. Ultimately, Ruth would like to work for the United States Postal Service.

For now, the family is getting by working for farmers in the area and by carefully managing their livestock. "Last year we spent $110 for a sow and five little pigs and that was our start," Ruth said. We kept the little ones and killed her [the sow] in the fall. We'll have another litter born next month and that'll be for the fall."

They also raise corn "on a third" — giving a third of the crop to the farmer who supplies the land and the seed. The remainder feeds their hogs. They also have a heifer, purchased with the proceeds from the sale of several hogs.

Ruth is very proud of her son, Kenneth, who takes care of the livestock. The boy graduated from eighth grade last spring. "He won an extra award and they called him up for outstanding behavior," she told me proudly. "It's helped that he's seen that without an education, [it's hard].

"I want a lot more for my kids than what I had," she added

thoughtfully. "I don't want them to feel like they have to leave [Kentucky] like I did."

Ruth is grateful to be back in a tiny town in Rockcastle County she describes as "one post office and one little country store." She has a typewriter on layaway and looks forward to a future that will be much fuller because of her education.

Becky Sue Brown's Story

"I decided last year I'm going to have to do something with my life," Becky Sue Brown told me one morning in September at the office of Family Service Society in Paducah, Kentucky. What this "welfare mother" with three children has done with her life is begin college.

"I want to be a RN [registered nurse]. I've always been interested in it," she said. "This is to get me a job. That way I can support myself and the kids.

"I'm the oldest of sixteen kids," she told me, explaining how her education was interrupted years ago. "I ended up having to quit school. My mother divorced my father and she went up in Illinois. She left ten kids at home. I had to stay home with them. Daddy worked out of town. There wasn't nobody but me to take care of them."

Becky Sue "lucked up" and was accepted into a program called Careers Development. "They pay my tuition, my books, and my uniforms," she told me.

"I didn't realize how expensive school was going to be. I couldn't have made it [without Careers Development]. I was planning on buying used books and they changed the curriculum and we had to have all new books. I was really stumped."

Becky Sue Brown attends vocational school in McCracken County, Kentucky. The oldest of sixteen children, she hopes to become a registered nurse.

She is grateful for the chance to advance herself and become independent. She did construction work after leaving an abusive husband she had married at the age of nineteen. However, she was injured on the job and had to have back surgery as a result.

Becky Sue now supports herself and her children, aged five, ten, and twelve, with a grant from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and various educational grants and loans.

Sometimes the programs she relies on do not provide the financial assistance she needs at the time she needs it. It was a cash flow problem that had brought her to the Family Service Society the morning we met. The charitable non-profit organization served more than 4,000 McCracken County families in 1987 who were in need because of illness, death, fire, delays in federal and state programs, unemployment, and other family crises.

"My rent's due," Becky Sue said. "It's $175 plus utilities. I haven't got my gas on right now. It's just water and electric. I'm trying to round my rent up. I have to pay my babysitter with my rent money.

"The babysitting money [provided by the state to welfare recipients enrolled in school] is two months behind. The babysitter needed it, too. If I don't have a babysitter, I can't go to school. My rent's due. My landlord just doesn't take that into consideration," she told me.

Besides trying to be a mother to her three children and balancing her budget, Becky Sue has to attend classes and study. "You've got to have three or four hours just for studying a lot of nights," she said.

Though it is difficult to meet all her responsibilities, Becky Sue has found some benefits in being a student at the same time her children are in school. "It seems they're all noticing the struggle I'm having to go through to do this."

"My little girl's grades have improved," she added proudly. "Her teacher ran me down the hall the other day. She told me all her grades and her homework's improving. She [my daughter] sits down with me. It's great. I go in my bedroom and study. She'll get her books and pop them all out. We'll study together. She don't understand something, she'll ask me. It's a lot of fun."

Apparently Becky Sue's son has been inspired by his mother, too. Although he is hyperactive and has a learning disability, Becky Sue told me, "He's in a normal class. They didn't expect him to function in a normal class. They said he'd never be able to be part of a normal class. He's a year behind in reading and he's been retained a grade. They test him yearly. The child psychologist from last year said that he had made all this progress after I started school."

Becky Sue is optimistic about what lies ahead for her children. "I hope in the years ahead, this will show them that there's no future in quitting school and you've got to think about the future. I want to be able to put them through college.

"My twelve-year-old wants a job," she continued. "I plan on letting her get a fast food job when she's fifteen and starting a college fund to help put herself through.

"I've got a lot of plans for them. It's really important. I don't want them to go through what I've done and as far as I'm concerned, they're not going to quit school," she said with determination.

"I started through the front door [of Bethany House in Olive Hill, Kentucky for a GED class] and I thought 'I can't do this, I'm too old' and I started back out through the door.

I was 32 or 33 and the lady that was teaching the classes said, 'Come in here, we've got some coffee. I went in and I saw another lady that I knew. We sat there and talked about for 40 minutes so then she said, 'I want you to listen to me tell you what you've learnt since you've been out of school.'

And from then on it was a challenge to see who could learn the most. There was five of us — all five got our GEDs. We drove to Morehead together and we took the test at the same time and we all got our scores at the same time. One of them is now in college learning to be a learning disabled teacher."

Donna Ankrom
Carter County
August 3, 1988

It will be several years before Becky earns her nursing degree. Her resolve and positive attitude along with her desire to be a model to her children should help her reach her goal.

Mary Carter's Story

"Right now I have to get up and get [my five-year-old son Stanley] to school. We get there around 7:45 a.m. I let him eat breakfast there, but he does not eat lunch there.

"Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I have to be back at my school by 9 a.m. At 10:30 I get out of class and pick up my little one [her two-year-old son Phillip] from the daycare they've got there in the school.

"I wait until 11:15 to pick up Stanley, feed both kids, and then go back to my school to get to a 1:12 class. Then they go to daycare at the school until 3:30."

This complicated schedule belongs to Mary Carter, a 27-year-old Daviess County woman, who is determined to earn a degree from the Owensboro Business School. Though she is a recipient of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, Mary hopes to become self- sufficient.

"I don't want to be a secretary," she told me. "I'm hoping to be able to build on word processing and I'd like to do architectural drafting." Although her school does not offer a drafting class, she believes she will be able to find a job at an architectural firm in Owensboro and learn drafting while she works.

"They've got a six-week drafting class at the vocational school in town, but I'd have to have somebody watch [the boys] at night. I

feel like I'm juggling everything at one time," she confessed.

Mary depends on a used car to get herself and her children to the right place at the right time. "This past month I must have put over $60 of stuff into my car," she said. "I still need work on the carburetor. It's pumping oil. I need two tires. They're showing their wire."

Mary is more than willing to deal with her deteriorating car and her complicated schedule. Both are keys to the education she believes she needs to survive financially.

"I could have tried to get a job at K-Mart or something like that," she said. "[But] I could not afford to do that. By the time I pay for daycare, and driving back and forth, I wouldn't have anything left over."

Childcare at Mary's business school is not ideal. "They mostly babysit, they don't teach." Nor does the center serve meals and it is open only three days a week. The three-day schedule means Mary cannot practice typing outside of classtime. Her schedule is full the three days the center is open. Nonetheless, without the center, Mary's schedule would be even more hectic and she is grateful to the staff for their willingness to accept late payments.

Fees for Mary's two children to attend the childcare center at Mary's school are $300 per month. The state contributes $218 through a program designed to encourage AFDC recipients to attend school. Although the state's payments are two months behind, the school gives Mary credit while they wait for the check.

Living on a tight budget is not new to Mary Carter. She was married for eight years to a man "who can't hold a job. We had so many bills piled up," she said.

Besides not working regularly, Mary's husband was very possessive and controlling. "I wasn't beaten," she said, "but he got to the point where he was dragging on my five year-old's arm. I went to our minister at the church and I talked to his mother and sister and they talked to him." Eventually, Mary sought help from the Owensboro Spouse Abuse and Information Center.

She lived at the center most of May and continues to go there for personal counseling. "I feel like a flower that's opened up," she said. "[Previously] I didn't participate in anything. I couldn't sit and talk to other women. I'd never done that. I was always in the house 24 hours a day, seven days a week. When we went someplace, I went with him or his mother. I didn't have any friends, especially anybody that was close to my age."

Mary and her children now live in a housing project. It is important to Mary that they spend a lot of time together. "We get down on the floor and make pictures. We go to the park. I splurged and we went and saw 'Roger Rabbit' at the first of this month. I don't know how many times we've been to the nature museum. We've gone barbecuing; we've gone down to the river and watched the boats.

"I don't know how many times [my husband] told the kids, 'I'll take you to the races; I'll take you to the store with me; we'll go fishing or we'll go camping.' But we never did."

Mary's older son, Stanley, seems to have adjusted to the new living situation. He no longer complains as he did in the past of constant headaches. "The baby still cries. He wants to stay" when he visits his father. Their father is now paying more attention to the boys and buying them more things than he did when the family lived under one roof.

Both boys have medical conditions that could require future care. Stanley was born with a club foot. "He had surgery done twice on it. It's about as good as it's ever going to get. When he's very active, his leg wears out real easy and he's got a bad limp then. His foot turns just a little bit, every once in a while. His left limb is much smaller.

"My two-year-old was born with a muscle in the side of his eye that was too long and it moves up or down too far. He looks cross-eyed sometimes. The doctor says he will probably grow out of that sometime when he gets bigger. If I hadn't been on the medical card at the time, I never would have been able to take him to the eye doctor," she said sighing.

Indeed, Mary Carter is juggling. If she can maintain the delicate balance of activities and budgeting that allows her to go to school, Mary will complete her studies. She then will have six months in which to repay an educational loan that is helping pay for her schooling. She looks ahead to this challenge calmly, just as she does to her daily tasks.

"After I'd been here awhile, my counselor at the school told me, when I started to school, they did not think I would make it," Mary told me. "They see there's more to me."

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY FOR THIS REPORT

I do not pretend that my research for this report is scientific. My only "hypothesis" was a feeling that low-income families in Kentucky were having a tough time. Because I interviewed people in such a wide variety of situations, I did not have a standard set of questions. In fact, to a great extent, I tried to let the interviewees control the interview. I wanted to hear their concerns and I was willing to listen to any story they were willing to share.

I found the 91 interviewees with the kind and generous help of 34 nonprofit organizations and programs across the state which are identified on our Acknowledgments Page. I initiated my contact with these organizations through letters, most of which were sent May 2, 1988. My original mailing list came from contacts Kentucky Youth Advocates had established over our eleven-year history as a statewide children's advocacy organization. As people learned about our project, they suggested additional names and, some 18 of the total 83 letters requesting assistance were sent after May 2. The letter and the response form are reprinted in Appendix 2.

I was surprised that so many organizations returned the optional response form. Frankly, I assumed we would have to do telephone follow-ups with virtually all the people I wrote. However, 25 organizations returned their forms or called to offer their cooperation. I marked a map as responses came in and began scheduling trips, with the first on May 31, 1988, and the last on October 12, 1988. Generally, I called the organizations which had not responded only if I needed a contact in its geographic area or if I had plans to be in the immediate vicinity.

On my trips, I usually met first with the director of a program to learn more about the program itself and what the staff considered primary problems of the population they serve. Then I conducted my interviews with their clients, or in some cases, their low-income staff. Some 32 of my 91 interviews were conducted in the presence of the staff person who arranged my visit. A total of 26 interviews were conducted in the interviewee's homes. Others took place in program offices or public buildings. Ten of the 91 individuals I interviewed were black or members of another minority group.

I generally traveled with one of my three-year-old twin sons, James or Joshua. While the boys' behavior was not perfect, it was very good and I found it easier to work with a child in tow. As Michelle Budzek, the Director of Welcome House put it, "You seem more real to people if you have a child."

I began each interview by introducing myself and my child, providing my interviewee a brochure about Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), and explaining that KYA did not provide direct services to families. I wanted to avoid giving anyone false hope that my organization could provide direct or immediate assistance to them. I explained that KYA performed research and wrote educational and informational reports. I also explained that, if there were a positive result from my report, it would not be a quick result and that it might not trickle down to their family at all.

Despite my precautions, people talked with me openly and with only two exceptions, no one asked me for anything. One woman asked if I could find out if there were a way her eighteen-year-old son could receive Medicaid and another asked me to make a telephone call to obtain information about a better apartment. (I responded to both requests.) My office and I did provide unsolicited material goods to several of the families I interviewed. Our gifts were made only after my interviews were concluded and generally the items were given indirectly, through whichever organization had introduced me to the family.

After obtaining permission to use a tape recorder, I recorded factual data about the family members: their names, ages, and, usually, their highest level of education. Then I asked an open-ended question, such as "Will you tell me about your experiences as a tenant?" or "What has it been like raising three children on AFDC?" or "Have you had any problems getting health care for your family?" Almost every interview flowed naturally from a lead question, quickly becoming a friendly conversation more than a formal interview.

Children sat on my lap or asked if they could play with my son. I talked with other mothers about buzz haircuts, childrens' sleeping habits, and their hopes for the future. Mothers and fathers and children, all told me intimate details of their lives, implicitly trusting me to use them in caring, helpful ways. Tears were shed and hugs exchanged more than once.

The interviews lasted from thirty minutes to two hours. Some were chaotic because of interruptions. Distracting noises, ranging from fans blowing to hogs squealing, were not uncommon. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked permission to photograph the family and, sometimes, their home. I was surprised that 54 of the 91 interviewees agreed to be photographed or to allow their children's pictures to be taken. Most cautious were women living in spouse abuse shelters who were trying to avoid harm from their husbands or former husbands. Some people declined being photographed, fearing they might lose their food stamps or medical card. A woman in Floyd County and a couple in Fayette County said they were afraid the Kentucky Cabinet for Human Resources might take their children from them if they appeared in my report.

Despite the refusal of some people to be photographed and the loss of some pictures due to technical problems, I had difficulty choosing photographs from the several hundred at our disposal. My task of selecting photographs for *Not Poor in Spirit* would no doubt have been even more difficult if I had accepted the offers of several photographers to accompany me. I declined all offers except that of Don Cull, a brother-in-law of a KYA staff person. Don photographed several families in Jefferson and Bullitt Counties. The reason I chose not to travel with a

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photographer is simple: I thought I would lose more than I would gain. I believe the introduction of another person into the interviewing process might have made people uncomfortable. Ultimately, too, their stories and not their pictures are what is important.

Following each trip, upon my return to Louisville, I wrote thank you letters to the organizations which had assisted me and notes to the families I had met, enclosing copies of any photographs I had taken.

Although I did not complete the interviews until October 12, 1988, I began writing the report in July. By then I had discovered many common themes and common problems. By writing a preliminary draft of parts of the report, I was able to conduct subsequent interviews more efficiently and with a little more perspective.

APPENDIX 2

OUR LETTER TO KENTUCKY ORGANIZATIONS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE

May 2, 1988

Dear _____:

I am writing to ask for your help in researching a report by Kentucky Youth Advocates on the "state of the family in Kentucky." We know that your work brings you in direct contact with children and families whose lives may illustrate shortcomings in the various helping systems of state and federal government. We hope that you can put us in touch with children or families with whom you have worked who might be willing to talk with us on a confidential basis.

Our staff has done a great deal of "soul searching" about how to be responsible and ethical in writing a report that documents poverty and its impact on a personal level. We are aware of and concerned about the danger of exploitation. We also believe that it would be dishonest for us to write such a report without including concrete, realistic recommendations for solutions to the problems we find.

If you are not familiar with our organization, we are a non-profit organization whose purpose is to make governmental agencies more accountable to poor children and families. We monitor the state's provision of services to this population and we perform research and education.

During our eleven-year history, we have published some 80 policy reports. I have enclosed a brochure which briefly describes our work.

The primary author of what we are calling our "families book" will be Nancy Gall-Clayton, age 42, who has been a part-time policy analyst on our staff for three years. Prior to the birth of her twin sons in 1984, she served on

the staff of the Legislative Research Commission's Health and Welfare Committee. She graduated from the University of Louisville School of Law eight years ago.

Nancy will be in touch with you by telephone in the next few weeks. She hopes to travel to your area during the early summer. We would greatly appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our request. It would be helpful if you could complete and mail back the enclosed form.

Sincerely,

David W. Richart
Executive Director

Nancy Gall-Clayton
Policy Analyst

DWR:NG
Enclosures

RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE ON KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES' "FAMILIES BOOK"

[ ] Please feel free to contact me to discuss your project in more detail. I know of individuals in my area who might talk with you on a confidential basis. Their stories might illustrate:

_____

_____

Signed _____

Title _____

Agency or Organization _____

Address _____

_____

Telephone ( ) _____

Please mail this form to:
Kentucky Youth Advocates
2024 Woodford Place
Louisville, Kentucky 40205

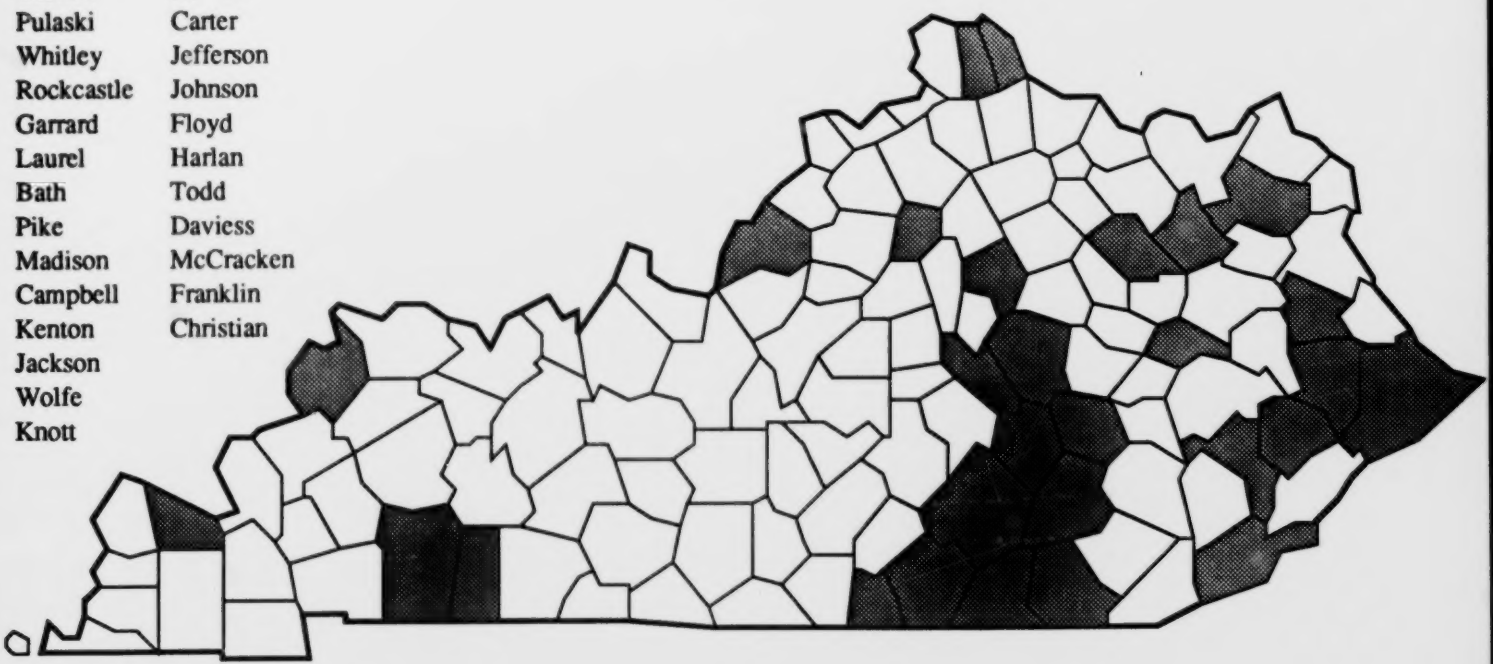
Thank you for your interest and help.

APPENDIX 3

Kentucky

MAP SHOWING HOME COUNTIES OF INTERVIEWEES

McCreary
Wayne
Clinton
Pulaski
Whitley
Rockcastle
Garrard
Laurel
Bath
Pike
Madison
Campbell
Kenton
Jackson
Wolfe
Knott
Perry
Fayette
Rowan
Carter
Jefferson
Johnson
Floyd
Harlan
Todd
Daviess
McCracken
Franklin
Christian



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KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES, INC.

Kentucky Youth Advocates operates as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization which serves the public independently. It researches, publishes, and distributes information about current and emerging policies affecting Kentucky's children, especially those who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged. KYA tries to make government agencies accountable to the needs of these children by providing information and analyses to both the public and private sectors. KYA functions as an independent analyst, critic, and problem-solver. KYA listens to children, their families, and service providers who are reluctant or unable to raise questions about existing policy.

Kentucky Youth Advocates, organized in 1975 and incorporated in 1977, receives financial support from philanthropic foundations, corporations, and private individuals. KYA conducts government-funded studies with the right to publish the results. In addition, KYA sells publications and charges for consultant services.

Kentucky Youth Advocates has offices in Louisville and Frankfort.